SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THE TRON CHURCH,

GLASGOW.

BY

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THIRD EDITION.

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TO

THE MEMBERS

OF THE

TRON CHURCH CONGREGATION,

GLASGOW,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS

ARE INSCRIBED,

WITH A LIVELY FEELING ON THE PART OF THEIR AUTHOR,

OF ALL THE KINDNESS AND GOOD WILL

WHICH HE HAS EXPERIENCED,

DURING THE TIME OF HIS CONNECTION WITH THEM,

AND

WITH EVERY ASSURANCE OF HIS AFFECTIONATE DESIRE

FOR THEIR BEST INTERESTS.

PREFACE.

The doctrine which is most urgently, and most frequently insisted on in the following volume, is that of the depravity of human nature, and it were certainly cruel to expose the unworthiness of man for the single object of disturbing him. But the cruelty is turned into kindness, when, along with the knowledge of the disease, there is offered an adequate and all-powerful remedy. It is impossible to have a true perception of our own character, in the sight of God, without feeling our need of acquittal; and in opposition to every

obstacle, which the justice of God seems to hold out to it, this want is provided for in the Gospel. And it is equally impossible, to have a true perception of the character of God, as being utterly repugnant to sin, without feeling the need of amendment; and in opposition to every obstacle, which the impotency of man holds out to it, this want is also provided for in the Gospel. There we behold the amplest securities for the peace of the guilty. But there do we also behold securities equally ample for their progress, and their perfection in holiness. Insomuch, that in every genuine disciple of the New Testament, we not only see one who, delivered from the burden of his fears, rejoices in hope of a coming glory—but we see one who, set free from the bondage of corruption, and animated by a new love and a new desire, is honest in the purposes, and strenuous in the efforts, and abundant in the works of

obedience. He feels the instigations of sin, and in this respect he differs from an angel. But he follows not the instigations of sin, and in this respect he differs from a natural or unconverted man. He may experience the motions of the flesh—but he walks not after the flesh. So that in him we may view the picture of a man, struggling with effect against his earth-born propensities, and yet hateful to himself for the very existence of them—holier than any of the people around him, and yet humbler than them all—realizing, from time to time, a positive increase to the grace and excellency of his character, and yet becoming more tenderly conscious every day of its remaining deformities,—gradually expanding in attainment, as well as in desire, towards the light and the liberty of heaven, and yet groaning under a yoke from which death alone will fully emancipate him.

When time and space have restrained an author of sermons from entering on what may be called the ethics of Christianity—it is the more incumbent on him to avouch of the doctrine of the gospel, that while it provides directly for the peace of a sinner, it provides no less directly and efficiently for the purity of his practice—that faith in this doctrine never terminates in itself, but is a mean to holiness as an end—and that he who truly accepts of Christ, as the alone foundation of his meritorious acceptance before God, is stimulated, by the circumstances of his new condition, to breathe holy purposes, and to abound in holy performances. He is created anew unto good works. He is made the workmanship of God in Christ Jesus.

The anxious enforcement of one great lesson on the part of a writer, generally proceeds from the desire to effect a full

and adequate conveyance, into the mind of another, of some truth which has filled his own mind, by a sense of its importance; and, in offering this volume to the public, the author is far from being insensible to the literary defects that from this cause may be charged upon it. He knows, in particular, that throughout these Discourses there is a frequent recurrence of the same idea, though generally expressed in different language, and with some new speciality, either in its bearing or in its illustration. And he further knows, that the habit of expatiating on one topic may be indulged to such a length, as to satiate the reader, and that, to a degree, far beyond the limits of his forbearance.

And yet, if a writer be conscious that, to gain a reception for his favourite doctrine, he must combat with certain elements of opposition, in the taste, or the pride, or

the indolence of those whom he is addressing, this will only serve to make him the more importunate, and so to betray him still farther into the fault of redundancy. If the lesson he is urging be of an intellectual character, he will labour to bring it home, as nearly as possible, to the understanding. If it be a moral lesson, he will labour to bring it home, as nearly as possible, to the heart. It is difficult, and it were hard to say in how far it would be right, to restrain this propensity in the pulpit, where the high matters of salvation are addressed to a multitude of individuals, who bring before the minister every possible variety of taste and of capacity; and it is no less difficult, when the compositions of the pulpit are transferred to the press, to detach from them a peculiarity by which their whole texture may be pervaded, and thus to free them from what may be counted by many to be the blemish of a very great and characteristic deformity.

There is, however, a difference between such truths as are merely of a speculative nature, and such as are allied with practice and moral feeling; and much ought to be conceded to this differenee. With the former, all repetition may often be superfluous; with the latter, it may just be by earnest repetition, that their influence comes to be thoroughly established over the mind of an inquirer. And if so much as one individual be gained over in this way to the cause of righteousness, he is untrue to the spirit and to the obligations of his office, who would not, for the sake of this one, willingly hazard all the rewards, and all the honours of literary estimation.

And, if there be one truth which, more than another, should be habitually presented to the notice, and proposed to the conviction of fallen creatures, it is the

humbling truth of their own depravity. This is a truth which may be recognized and read in every exhibition of unrenewed nature; but it often lurks under a specious disguise, and it is surely of the utmost practical importance to unveil and elicit a principle, which, when admitted into the heart, may be considered as the great basis of a sinner's religion.

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SERMON I.

THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.



1 CORINTHIANS ii. 4, 5.

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

PAUL, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, has expressed himself to the same effect as in the text, in the following words: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit."

In both these passages, the Apostle points to a speciality in the work of a Christian teacher,

—a something essential to its success, and which is not essential to the proficiency of scholars in the ordinary branches of education,—an influence that is beyond the reach of human power and human wisdom; and to obtain which, immediate recourse must be had, in the way of prayer and dependence, to the power of God.—Without attempting a full exposition of these different verses, we shall, first, endeavour to direct your attention to that part of the work of a Christian teacher, which it has in common with any other kind of education; and, secondly, offer a few remarks on the speciality that is adverted to in the text.

I. And here it must be admitted, that, even in the ordinary branches of human learning, the success of the teacher, on the one hand, and the proficiency of the scholars, on the other, are still dependent on the will of God. It is true, that, in this case, we are not so ready to feel our dependence. God is apt to be overlooked in all those cases where he acts with uniformity. Wherever we see what we call the operation of a law of nature, we are apt to shut our eye against the operation of his hand; and faith in the constancy of this law is sure to beget, in the mind, a sentiment of independence on the power and will of the Deity. Now, in the matters of

human education, God acts with uniformity. Let there be zeal and ability on the part of the teacher, and an ordinary degree of aptitude, on the part of the taught,—and the result of their vigorous and well-sustained co-operation may in general be counted upon. Let the parent who witnesses his son's capacity, and his generous ambition for improvement, send him to a well-qualified instructor, and he will be filled with the hopeful sentiment of his future eminence, without any reference to God whatever,—without so much as ever thinking of his purpose or of his agency, in the matter, or its once occurring to him to make the proficiency of his son the subject of prayer. This is the way in which nature, by the constancy of her operations, is made to usurp the place of God: and it goes far to spread, and to establish the delusion, when we attend to the obvious fact, that a man of the most splendid genius may be destitute of piety; that he may fill the office of an instructor, with the greatest talent and success, and yet be without reverence for God, and practically disown him; and that thousands of our youth may issue every year warm from the schools of philosophy, stored with all her lessons, and adorned with all her accomplishments, and yet be utter strangers to the power of godliness, and be filled with an utter distaste and antipathy for its name. All

this helps on the practical conviction, that common education is a business, with which prayer and the exercise of dependence on God have no concern. It is true, that a Christian parent will see through the vanity of this delusion. Instructed to make his requests known unto God in all things, he will not depose him from the supremacy of his power and of his government over this one thing,—he will commit to God the progress of his son in every one branch of education he may put him to; and, knowing that the talent of every teacher, and the continuance of his zeal, and his powers of communication, and his faculty of interesting the attention of his pupils,—that all these are the gifts of God, and may be withdrawn by him at pleasure,—he will not suffer the regular march and movement of what is visible or created to cast him out of his dependence on the Creator. He will see that every one element which enters into the business of education, and conspires to the result of an accomplished and a well informed scholar is in the hand of the Deity, and he will pray for the continuation of these elements: and, while science is raising her wondrous monuments, and drawing the admiration of the world after her, it remains to be seen, on the day of the revelation of hidden things, whether the prayers of the humble and derided

Christian, for a blessing on those to whom he has confided the object of his tenderness, have not sustained the vigour and the brilliancy of those very talents on which the world is lavishing the idolatry of her praise.

Let us now conceive the very ablest of these teachers, to bring all his powers and all his accomplishments to bear on the subject of Christianity. Has he skill in the languages? The very same process by which he gets at the meaning of any ancient author, carries him to a fair and a faithful rendering of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Has he a mind enlightened and exercised on questions of erudition? The very same principles which qualify him to decide on the genuineness of any old publication, enable him to demonstrate the genuineness of the Bible, and how fully sustained it is on the evidence of history. Has he that sagacity and comprehension of talent, by which he can seize on the leading principles which run through the writings of some eminent philosopher? This very exercise may be gone through on the writings of Inspiration; and the man, who, with the works of Aristotle before him, can present the world with the best system or summary of his principles, might transfer these very powers to the works of the Apostles and Evangelists, and present the world with a just and interesting

survey of the doctrines of our faith. And thus it is, that the man who might stand the highest of his fellows in the field of ordinary scholarship, might turn his entire mind to the field of Christianity; and, by the very same kind of talent, which would have made him the most eminent of all the philosophers, he might come to be counted the most eminent of all the theologians; and he who could have reared to his fame some monument of literary genius, might now, by the labours of his midnight oil, rear some beauteous and consistent fabric of orthodoxy, strengthened, in all its parts, by one unbroken chain of reasoning, and recommended throughout by the powers of a persuasive and captivating eloquence.

So much for the talents which a Christian teacher may employ, in common with other teachers; and even though they did make up all the qualifications necessary for his office, there would still be a call, as we said before, for the exercise of dependence upon God. Well do we know, that both he and his hearers would be apt to put their faith in the uniformity of nature; and forgetting that it is the inspiration of the Almighty which giveth and preserveth the understanding of all his creatures, might be tempted to repose that confidence in man, which displaces God from the sovereignty that

belongs to him. But what we wish to prepare you for, by the preceding observations, is, that you may understand the altogether peculiar call that there is for dependence on God, in the case of a Christian teacher. We have made a short enumeration of those talents which a teacher of Christianity might possess, in common with other teachers; but it is for the purpose of proving that he might possess them all, and heightened to such a degree, if you will, as would have made him illustrious on any other field, and yet be utterly destitute of powers for acquiring himself, or of experience for teaching others, that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ which is life everlasting.

With the many brilliant and imposing things which he may have, there is one thing which he may not have, and the want of that one thing may form an invincible barrier to his usefulness in the vineyard of Christ. If, conscious that he wants it, he seek to obtain from God the sufficiency which is not in himself, then he is in a likely way of being put in possession of that power, which alone is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. But if he, on the one hand, proudly conceiving the sufficiency to be in himself, enter with aspiring confidence into the field of argument, and think that he is to carry all before him, by a series of invincible

demonstrations; or, if his people, on the other hand, ever ready to be set in motion by the idle impulse of novelty, or to be seduced by the glare of human accomplishments, come in trooping multitudes around him, and hang on the eloquence of his lips, or the wisdom of his able and profound understanding, a more unchristian attitude cannot be conceived, nor shall we venture to compute the weekly accumulation of guilt which may come upon the parties, when such a business as this is going on. How little must the presence of God be felt in that place, where the high functions of the pulpit are degraded into a stipulated exchange of entertainment, on the one side, and of admiration, on the other; and surely it were a sight to make angels weep, when a weak and vapouring mortal, surrounded by his fellow sinners, and hastening to the grave and the judgment along with them, finds it a dearer object to his bosom, to regale his hearers by the exhibition of himself, than to do, in plain earnest, the work of his Master, and urge on the business of repentance and of faith, by the impressive simplicities of the Gospel.

II. This brings us to the second head of discourse, under which we shall attempt to give you a clear view of what that is which consti-

tutes a speciality in the work of a Christian teacher. And to carry you at once, by a few plain instances, to the matter we are aiming to impress upon you, let us suppose a man to take up his Bible, and, with the same powers of attention and understanding which enable him to comprehend the subject of any other book, there is much in this book also which he will be able to perceive and to talk of intelligently. Thus, for example, he may come, by the mere exercise of his ordinary powers, to understand that it is the Holy Spirit which taketh of the things of Christ, and showeth them to the mind of man. But is not his understanding of this truth, as it is put down in the plain language of the New Testament, a very different thing from the Holy Spirit actually taking of these things and showing them unto him? Again, he will be able to say, and to annex a plain meaning to what he says, that man is rescued from his natural darkness about the things of God, by God who created the light out of darkness shining in his heart, and giving him the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. But is not his saying this, and understanding this, by taking up these words in the same obvious way in which any man of plain and honest understanding would do, a very different thing from God actually putting forth his creative energy upon

him, and actually shining upon his heart, and giving him that light and that knowledge which are expressed in the passage here alluded to? Again, by the very same exercise wherewith he renders the sentence of an old author into his own language, and perceives the meaning of that sentence, will he annex a meaning to the following sentence of the Bible,—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." By the mere dint of that shrewdness and sagacity with which nature has endowed him, he will perceive a meaning here which you will readily acknowledge could not be perceived by a man in a state of idiotism. In the case of the idiot, there is a complete barrier against his ever acquiring that conception of the meaning of this passage, which is quite competent to a man of a strong and accomplished understanding. For the sake of illustration, we may conceive this poor outcast from the common light of humanity, in some unaccountable fit of attention, listening to the sound of these words, and making some strenuous but abortive attempts to arrive at the same comprehension of them with a man whose reason is entire. But he cannot shake off the fetters which the hand of nature has laid upon his

understanding; and he goes back again to the dimness and delirium of his unhappy situation; and his mind locks itself up in the prison-hold of its confined and darkened faculties; and if, in his mysterious state of existence, he formed any conception whatever of the words now uttered in your hearing, we may rest assured, that it stands distinguished by a wide and impassable chasm, from the conception of him who has all the common powers and perceptions of the species.

Now, we would ask what kind of conception is that which a man of entire faculties may form? Only grant us the undeniable truth, that he may understand how he cannot discern the things of the Spirit, unless the Spirit reveal them to him, and yet with this understanding, he may not be one of those in behalf of whom the Spirit hath actually interposed with His peculiar office of revelation; and then you bring into view another barrier, no less insurmountable than that which fixes an immutable distinction between the conceptions of an idiot and of a man of sense,—even that wonderful barrier which separates the natural from the spiritual man. You can conceive him struggling, with every power which nature hath given him, to work his way through this barrier. You can conceive him vainly attempting, by some energies

of his own, to force an entrance into that field of light, where every object of faith has the bright colouring of reality thrown over it,—where he can command a clear view of the things of eternity,—where spiritual truth comes home with effect upon his every feeling, and his every conviction,—where he can expatiate at freedom over a scene of manifestation, which the world knoweth not,—and breathe such a peace, and such a joy, and such a holiness, and such a superiority to time, and such a devotedness of all his affections to the things which are above, as no man of the highest natural wisdom can ever reach, with all his attention to the Bible, and all the efforts of his sagacity, however painful, to unravel, and to compare, and to comprehend its passages. And it is indeed a deeply interesting object, to see a man of powerful understanding thus visited with an earnest desire after the light of the gospel; and toiling, at the entrance, with all the energies which belong to him,—pressing into the service all the resources of argument and philosophy,—mustering, to the high enterprise, his attention, and his conception, and his reason, and his imagination, and the whole host of his other faculties, on which science has conferred her imposing names, and laid before us in such a pompous catalogue, as might tempt us to believe, that

man, by one mighty grasp of his creative mind, can make all truth his own, and range at pleasure over the wide variety of her dominions. How natural to think, that the same powers and habits of investigation which carried him to so respectable a height in the natural sciences, will enable him to clear his way through all the darkness of theology. It is well that he is seeking,—for if he persevere and be in earnest, he will obtain an interest in the promise, and will at length find:—but not till he find, in the progress of those inquiries on which he entered with so much alacrity, and prosecuted with so much confidence, that there is a barrier between him and the spiritual discernment of his Bible, which all the powers of philosophy cannot scale, —not till he find that he must cast down his lofty imaginations, and put the pride of all his powers and all his pretensions away from him, —not till he find that, divested of those fancies which deluded his heart into a feeling of its own sufficiency, he must become like a little child, or one of those babes to whom God reveals the things which he hides from the wise and from the prudent,—not till he find that the attitude of self-dependence must be broken down, and he be brought to acknowledge, that the light he is aspiring after is not created by himself, but must be made to shine upon him at the

pleasure of another,—not, in short, till, humbled by the mortifying experience, that many a simple cottager, who reads his Bible and loves his Saviour, has got before him, he puts himself on a level with the most illiterate of them all, and prays that light and truth may beam on his darkened understanding from the sanctuary of God.

We read of the letter, and we read also of the spirit, of the New Testament. It would require a volume, rather than a single paragraph of a single sermon, to draw the line between the one and the other. But you will readily acknowledge, that there are many things of this book, which a man, though untaught by the Spirit of God, may be made to know. One of the simplest instances is, he may learn the number of chapters in every book, and the number of verses in every chapter.—But is this all? No,—for by the natural exercise of his memory he may be able to master all its historical information. And is this all? No,—for by the natural exercise of his judgment he may compare scripture with scripture,—he may learn what its doctrines are,—he may demonstrate the orthodoxy of every one article in our national confession,—he may rank among the ablest and most judicious of the commentators,—he may read, and with understanding too, many a ponderous vo-

lume,—he may store himself with the learning of many generations,—he may be familiar with all the systems, and have mingled with all the controversies,—and yet, with a mind supporting as it does the burden of the erudition of whole libraries, he may have gotten to himself no other wisdom than the wisdom of the letter of the New Testament. The man's creed, with all its arranged and its well-weighed articles, may be no better than the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel, put together into a skeleton, and fastened with sinews, and covered with flesh and skin, and exhibiting to the eye of the spectators, the aspect and the lineaments of a man, but without breath, and remaining so, till the Spirit of God breathed into it, and it lived. And it is, in truth, a sight of wonder, to behold a man who has carried his knowledge of Scripture as far as the wisdom of man can carry it,—to see him blessed with all the light which nature can give, but labouring under all the darkness which no power of nature can dispel,—to see this man of many accomplishments, who can bring his every power of demonstration to bear upon the Bible, carrying in his bosom a heart uncheered by any one of its consolations, unmoved by the influence of any one of its truths, unshaken out of any one attachment to the world, and an utter stranger to those high resolves, and the power

of those great and animating prospects, which shed a glory over the daily walk of a believer, and give to every one of his doings the high character of a candidate for eternity.

We are quite aware of the doubts which this is calculated to excite in the mind of the hearer, —nor is it possible, within the compass of an hour, to stop and satisfy them all; or to come to a timely conclusion, without leaving a number of unresolved questions behind us. There is one, however, which we cannot pass without observation. Does not this doctrine of a revelation of the Spirit, it may be asked, additional to the revelation of the Word, open a door to the most unbridled variety? May it not give a sanction to any conceptions of any visionary pretenders, and clothe, in all the authority of inspiration, a set of doctrines not to be found within the compass of the written record? Does it not set aside the usefulness of the Bible, and break in upon the unity and consistency of revealed truth, by letting loose upon the world a succession of fancies, as endless and as variable as are the caprices of the human imagination? All very true, did we ever pretend that the office of the Spirit was to reveal any thing additional to the information, whether in the way of doctrine or of duty, which the Bible sets before us. But his office, as defined by the Bible it-

self, is not to make known to us any truths which are not contained in the Bible; but to make clear to our understandings the truths which are contained in it. He opens our understandings to understand the Scriptures. The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit. It is the instrument by which the Spirit worketh. He does not tell us any thing that is out of the record; but all that is within it he sends home, with clearness and effect, upon the mind. He does not make us wise above that which is written; but he makes us wise up to that which is written. When a telescope is directed to some distant landscape, it enables us to see what we could not otherwise have seen; but it does not enable us to see any thing which has not a real existence in the prospect before us. It does not present to the eye any delusive imagery,—neither is that a fanciful and fictitious scene which it throws open to our contemplation. The natural eye saw nothing but blue land stretching along the distant horizon. By the aid of the glass, there bursts upon it a charming variety of fields, and woods, and spires, and villages. Yet who would say that the glass added one feature to this assemblage? It discovers nothing to us which is not there; nor, out of that portion of the book of nature which we are employed in contemplating, does

it bring into view a single character, which is not really and previously inscribed upon it. And so of the Spirit. He does not add a single truth, or a single character, to the Book of Revelation. He enables the spiritual man to see what the natural man cannot see; but the spectacle which he lays open is uniform and immutable. It is the Word of God, which is ever the same;—and he whom the Spirit of God has enabled to look to the Bible with a clear and affecting discernment, sees no phantom passing before him; but, amid all the visionary extravagance with which he is charged, can, for every one article of his faith, and every one duty of his practice, make his triumphant appeal to the law and to the testimony.

We trust that this may be made clear by one example. We have not to travel out of the record for the purpose of having this truth made known to us,—that God is every where present. It meets the observation of the natural man in his reading of the Bible; and he understands, or thinks he understands, the terms in which it is delivered; and he can speak of it with consistency; and he ranks it with the other attributes of God; and he gives it an avowed and a formal admission among the articles of his creed; and yet, with all this parade of light and of knowledge, he, upon the subject of the all-seeing and

the ever-present Deity, labours under all the obstinacy of an habitual blindness. Carry him abroad, and you will find that the light which beams upon his senses, from the objects of sight, completely overpowers that light which ought to beam upon his spirit, from this object of faith. He may occasionally think of it as he does of other things; but for every one practical purpose the thought abandons him, so soon as he goes into the next company, or takes a part in the next worldly concern, which, in the course of his business, comes round to him. It completely disappears as an element of conduct, and he talks, and thinks, and reasons, just as he would have done, had his mind, in reference to God, been in a state of entire darkness. If any thing like a right conception of the matter ever exist in his heart, the din and the day-light of the world drive it all away from him. Now, to rectify this case, it is surely not necessary that the Spirit add any thing to the truth of God's omnipresence, as it is put down in the written record. It will be enough, that he gives to the mind on which he operates a steady and enduring impression of this truth. Now, this is one part of his office, and accordingly it is said of the unction of the Spirit, that it is an unction which remaineth. Neither is it necessary that the light which he communicates should consist in

any vision which he gives to the eye, or in any bright impression upon the fancy, of any one thing not to be found within the pages of the Bible. It will be enough, if he give a clear and vigorous apprehension of the truth, just as it is written, to the understanding. Though the Spirit should do no more than give vivacity and effect, to the truth of the constancy of God's presence, just as it stands in the written record —this will be quite enough to make the man who is under its influence carry an habitual sense of God about with him, think of him in the shop and in the market place, walk with him all the day long, and feel the same moral restraint upon his doings, as if some visible superior, whose virtues he revered, and whose approbation he longed after, haunted his every footstep, and kept an attentive eye fastened upon the whole course of his history. The natural man may have sense, and he may have sagacity, and a readiness withal to admit the constancy of God's presence, as an undeniable doctrine of the Bible. But to the power of this truth he is dead; and it is only to the power of this world's interests and pleasures that he is alive. The spiritual man is the reverse of all this, and that without carrying his conceptions a single hair-breadth beyond the communications of the written message. He makes no pretensions to

wisdom, by one jot or one tittle, beyond the testimony of Scripture; and yet, after all, he lives under a revelation to which the other is a stranger. It does not carry him, by a single footstep, without the field of the written revelation, but it throws a radiance over every object within it. It furnishes him with a constant light which enables him to withstand the domineering influence of sight and of sense. He dies unto the world, he lives unto God,—and the reason is, that there rests upon him a peculiar manifestation, by which the truth is made visible to the eye of his mind, and a peculiar energy, by which it comes home upon his conscience. And if you come to inquire into the cause of this speciality, it is the language of the Bible, confirmed, as we believe it to be, by the soundest experience, that every power which nature has conferred upon man, exalted to its highest measure, and called forth to its most strenuous exercise, is not able to accomplish it,—that it is due to a power above nature, and beyond it, that it is due to what the Apostle calls the demonstration of the Spirit,—a demonstration withheld from the self-sufficient exertions of man, and given to his believing prayers.

And here we are reminded of an instructive passage, in the life of one of our earliest and most eminent reformers. When the light of

divine truth broke in upon his heart, it was so new and so delightful to one formerly darkened by the errors of Popery—he saw such a power and such an evidence along with it,—he was so ravished by its beauties, and so carried along by its resistless arguments, that he felt as if he had nothing to do, but to brandish those mighty weapons, that he might gain all hearts, and carry every thing before him. But he did not calculate on the stubborn resistance of corrupt human nature, to him and to his reasonings. He preached, and he argued, and he put forth all his powers of eloquence amongst them. But, mortified that so many hearts remained hardened, that so many hearers resisted him, that the doors of so many hearts were kept shut, in spite of all his loud and repeated warnings, that so many souls remained unsubdued, and dead in trespasses and sins, he was heard to exclaim, that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon.

There is the malignity of the fall which adheres to us. There is a power of corruption and of blindness along with it, which it is beyond the compass of human means to overthrow. There is a dark and settled depravity in the human character, which maintains its gloomy and obstinate resistance to all our warnings, and all our arguments. There is a spirit

working in the children of disobedience, which no power of human eloquence can lay. There is a covering of thick darkness upon the face of all people, a mighty influence abroad upon the world, with which the Prince of the power of the air keeps his thousands and his tens of thousands under him. The minister who enters into this field of conflict, may have zeal, and talents, and eloquence. His heart may be smitten with the love of the truth, and his mind be fully fraught with its arguments. Thus armed, he may come forth among his people, flushed with the mighty enterprise of turning souls from the dominion of Satan unto God. In all the hope of victory, he may discharge the weapons of his warfare among them. Week after week, he may reason with them out of the Scriptures. Sabbath after Sabbath, he may declaim, he may demonstrate, he may put forth every expedient; he may, at one time, set in array before them the terrors of the law, at another, he may try to win them by the free offer of the Gospel; and, in the proud confidence of success, he may think that nothing can withstand him, and that the heart of every hearer must give way before the ardour of his zeal, and the power of his invincible arguments. Yes: they may admire him, and they may follow him, but the question we have to ask is, will they be converted by

him? They may even go so far as to allow that it is all very true he says. He may be their favourite preacher, and when he opens his exhortations upon them, there may be a deep and a solemn attention in every countenance. But how is the heart coming on all the while? How do these people live, and what evidence are they giving of being born again, under the power of his ministry? It is not enough to be told of those momentary convictions which flash from the pulpit, and carry a thrilling influence along with them through the hearts of listening admirers. Have these hearers of the word become the doers of the word? Have they sunk down into the character of humble, and sanctified, and penitent, and pains-taking Christians? Where, where is the fruit? And while the preaching of Christ is all their joy, has the will of Christ become all their direction? Alas! he may look around him, and, at the end of the year, after all the tumults of a sounding popularity, he may find the great bulk of them just where they were,—as listless and unconcerned about the things of eternity,—as obstinately alienated from God,—as firmly devoted to selfish and transitory interests,—as exclusively set upon the farm, and the money, and the merchandise,—and, with the covering of many external decencies, to make them as fair and plau-

sible as their neighbours around them, proving, by a heart given, with the whole tide of its affections, to the vanities of the world, that they have their full share of the wickedness which abounds in it. After all his sermons, and all his loud and passionate addresses, he finds that the power of darkness still keeps its ground among them. He is grieved to learn, that all he has said has had no more effect than the foolish and the feeble lispings of infancy. He is overwhelmed by a sense of his own helplessness, and the lesson is a wholesome one. It makes him feel that the sufficiency is not in him, but in God; it makes him understand that another power must be brought to bear upon the mass of resistance which is before him; and let the man of confident and aspiring genius, who thought he was to assail the dark seats of human corruption, and to carry them by storm, let him be reduced in mortified and dependent humbleness to the expedient of the Apostle, let him crave the intercessions of his people, and throw himself upon their prayers.

Let us now bring the whole matter to a practical conclusion. For the acquirement of a saving and spiritual knowledge of the gospel, you are, on the one hand, to put forth all your ordinary powers, in the very same way that you do for the acquirement of knowledge in any of

the ordinary branches of human learning. But in the act of doing so, you, on the other hand, are to proceed on a profound impression of the utter fruitlessness of all your endeavours, unless God meet them by the manifestations of his Spirit. In other words, you are to read your Bible, and to bring your faculties of attention, and understanding, and memory, to the exercise, just as strenuously as if these, and these alone, could conduct you to the light after which you are aspiring. But you are, at the same time, to pray as earnestly for this object, as if God accomplished it without your exertions at all, instead of accomplishing it in the way he actually does, by your exertions. It is when your eyes are turned toward the Book of God's testimony, and not when your eyes are turned away from it, that he fulfils upon you the petition of the Psalmist,—"Lord, do thou open mine eyes, that I may behold the wondrous things contained in thy law." You are not to exercise your faculties in searching after truth without prayer, else God will withhold from you his illuminating influences. And you are not to pray for truth, without exercising your faculties, else God will reject your prayers, as the mockery of a hypocrite. But you are to do both, and this is in harmony with the whole style of a Christian's obedience, who is as

strenuous in doing as if his doings were to accomplish all, and as fervent in prayer as if, without the inspiring energy of God, all his doings were vanity and feebleness.

And the great Apostle may be quoted as the best example of this observation. There never existed a man, more active than Paul, in the work of the Christian ministry. How great the weight and the variety of his labours! What preaching, what travelling, what writing of letters, what daily struggling with difficulties, what constant exercise of thought, in watching over the churches, what a world of perplexity in his dealings with men, and in the hard dealings of men with him! and were they friends, or were they enemies, how his mind behoved to be ever on the alert, in counselling the one, and in warding off the hostility of the other! Look to all that is visible in the life of this Apostle, and you see nothing but bustle, and enterprise, and variety. You see a man intent on the furtherance of some great object, and in the prosecution of it, as ever diligent, and as ever doing, as if the whole burden of it lay upon himself, or as if it were reserved for the strength of his solitary arm to accomplish it. To this object he consecrated every moment of his time, and even when he set him down to the work of a tent-maker, for the sake of vindi-

cating the purity of his intentions, and holding forth an example of honest independence to the poorer brethren—even here, you just see another display of the one principle which possessed his whole heart, and gave such a character of wondrous activity to all the days of his earthly pilgrimage. There are some who are so far misled, by a kind of perverse theology which they have adopted, as to hesitate about the lawfulness of being diligent and doing, in the use of means. While they are slumbering over their speculation, and proving how honestly they put faith in it by doing nothing, let us be guided by the example of the pains-taking and industrious Paul, and remember, that never since the days of this Apostle, who calls upon us to be followers of him, even as he was of Christ,—never were the labours of human exertion more faithfully rendered,—never were the workings of a human instrument put forth with greater energy.

But, it forms a still more striking part of the example of Paul, that, while he did as much toward the extension of the Christian faith, as if the whole success of the cause depended upon his doing, he prayed as much, and as fervently, for this object, as if all his doings were of no consequence. A fine testimony to the supremacy of God, from the man, who, in labours,

was more abundant than any who ever came after him, that he counted all as nothing, unless God would interfere to put his blessing upon all, and to give his efficiency to all! He who looked so busy, and whose hand was so constantly engaged, in the work that was before him, looked for all his success to that help which cometh from the sanctuary of God. There was his eye directed. Thence alone did he expect a blessing upon his endeavours. He wrought, and that with diligence too, because God bade him; but he also prayed, and that with equal diligence, because God had revealed to him, that plant as he may, and water as he may, God alone giveth the increase. He did homage to the will of God, by the labours of the ever-working minister,—and he did homage to the power of God, by the devotions of the ever praying minister. He did not say, what signifies my working, for God alone can work with effect? This is very true, but God chooses to work by instruments,—and Paul, by the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" expressed his readiness to be an instrument in his hand. Neither did he say, what signifies my praying, for I have got a work here to do, and it is enough that I be diligent in the performance of it. No—for the power of God must be acknowledged, and a sense of his

power must mingle with all our performances: and therefore it is that the Apostle kept both working and praying; and with him they formed two distinct emanations of the same principle: and while there are many who make these Christian graces to neutralize each other, the judicious and the clear-sighted Paul, who had received the spirit of a sound mind, could give his unembarrassed vigour to both these exercises, and combine, in his own example, the utmost diligence in doing, with the utmost dependence on Him who can alone give to that doing all its fruits and all its efficacy.

The union of these two graces has, at times, been finely exemplified in the later and uninspired ages of the Christian church; and the case of the missionary, Elliot, is the first and the most impressive that occurs to us. His labours, like those of the great Apostle, were directed to the extension of the vineyard of Christ,—and he was among the very first who put forth his hand to the breaking up of the American wilderness. For this purpose did he set himself down to the acquirement of a harsh and barbarous language; and he became qualified to confer with savages; and he grappled for years with their untractable humours; and he collected these wanderers into villages; and while other reformers have ennobled their names

by the formation of a new set of public laws, did he take upon him the far more arduous task of creating, for his untamed Indians, a new set of domestic habits; and such was the power of his influence, that he carried his Christianizing system into the very bosom of their families; and he spread art, and learning, and civilization amongst them; and to his visible labours among his people he added the labours of the closet; and he translated the whole Bible into their tongue; and he set up a regular provision for the education of their children; and, lest the spectator who saw his fourteen towns risen as by enchantment in the desert, and peopled by the rudest of its tribes, should ask in vain for the mighty power by which such wondrous things had been brought to pass, this venerable priest left his testimony behind him; and neither overlooking the agency of God, nor the agency of man as the instrument of God, he tells us, in one memorable sentence written by himself at the end of his Indian grammar, that "prayers and pains, through faith in Christ Jesus, can do any thing."

The last inference we shall draw from this topic is the duty and importance of prayer among Christians, for the success of the ministry of the Gospel. Paul had a high sense of the efficacy of prayer. Not according to that

refined view of it, which, making all its influence to consist in its improving and moralizing effect upon the mind, fritters down to nothing the plain import and significancy of this ordinance. With him it was a matter of asking and of receiving. And just as when in pursuit of some earthly benefit which is at the giving of another, you think yourselves surer of your object the more you multiply the number of askers and the number of applications,—in this very way did he, if we may be allowed the expression, contrive to strengthen and extend his interest in the court of heaven. He craved the intercessions of his people. There were many believers formed under his ministry, and each of these could bring the prayer of faith to bear upon the counsels of God, and bring down a larger portion of strength and of fitness to rest on the Apostle for making more believers. It was a kind of creative or accumulating process. After he had travailed in birth with his new converts till Christ was formed in them, this was the use he put them to. It is an expedient which harmonizes with the methods of Providence and the will of God, who orders intercessions, and on the very principle, too, that he willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The intercession of Christians, who are already formed, is the leaven which is

to leaven the whole earth with Christianity. It is one of the destined instruments, in the hand of God, for hastening the glory of the latter days. Take the world at large, and the doctrine of intercession, as an engine of mighty power, is derided as one of the reveries of fanaticism. This is a subject on which the men of the world are in a deep slumber; but there are watchmen who never hold their peace, day nor night, and to them God addresses these remarkable words: "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

SERMON II.

THE MYSTERIOUS ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL TO THE MEN OF THE WORLD.



EZEKIEL xx. 49.

"Then said I, Ah, Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?"

In parables, the lesson that is meant to be conveyed is, to a certain degree, shaded in obscurity. They are associated by the Psalmist with dark sayings—"I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old." We read in the New Testament of a parable leaving all the effect of an unexplained mystery upon the understanding of the general audience to which it was addressed; and the explanation of the parable given to a special few was to them the clearing up of a mystery. "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given!"

The prophets of old were often commissioned to address their countrymen under the guise of symbolical language. This threw a veil over the meaning of their communications; and though it was a veil of such transparency as could be seen through by those who looked earnestly and attentively, and with a humble desire to be taught in the will of God, yet there was dimness enough to intercept all the moral, and all the significancy, from the minds of those who wanted principle to be in earnest; or who wanted patience for the exercise of attention; or who wanted such a concern about God, as either to care very much for his will, or to feel that any thing which respected him was worth the trouble of a very serious investigation.

They who wanted this concern and this principle, from them was taken away even that which they had. God at length ceased from his messages, and the Spirit of God ceased from his warnings. They who had the preparation of all this docility, to them more was given. Their honest desire after knowledge was rewarded by the acquirement of it. They continued to look, and to inquire, and at length they were illuminated; and thus was fulfilled the saying of the Saviour, that "whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly,—but whosoever hath not,

from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

It is not difficult to conceive how the obscure intimations of Ezekiel would be taken by the careless and ungodly men of his generation. It is likely that even from the naked denunciations of vengeance they would have turned contemptuously away. And it is still more likely that they would refuse the impression of them, when offered to their notice, under a figurative disguise. It is not at all to be supposed that they would put forth any activity of mind in quest of that which they nauseated, and of that which, if ever they had found, they would have found to be utterly revolting to all their habits of impiety. They are the very last men we should expect to meet with at the work of a pains-taking search after the interpretation of these parables. Nay, they would gladly fasten upon the obscurity of them both as a circumstance of reproach against the prophet, and as an apology for their own indifference. And thus it is, that to be a teacher of parables might at length become a scoff and a bye-word; and the prophet seems to have felt the force of it as an opprobrious designation,—seems to be looking forward to the mixture of disdain and impatience with which he would be listened to, when God charged him with an allegorical communication

to his countrymen, and he answered, "Ah, Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?"

Now, the question we have to put is, Is there no similar plea of resistance ever preferred against the faithful messengers of God, in the present day? It is true, that, in our time, there is no such thing as a man coming amongst you, charged with the utterance of a direct and personal inspiration. But it is the business of every minister truly to expound the record of inspiration; and is it not very possible that, in so doing, he may be reproached, not for preaching parabolically, but for preaching mysteriously? Have you never heard of a sermon being called mystical? and what shall we think of it, if, in point of fact, this imputation fall most readily and most abundantly on the sermon that is most pervaded by the spirit, and most overrun with the phraseology of the New Testament? In that composition there are certain terms which recur incessantly, and which would therefore appear to represent certain very leading and prominent ideas. Now, whether are these ideas clearly and promptly suggested to your mind by the utterance of the terms? What are the general character and effect which, in your eye, is imparted to a sermon, when, throughout the whole of it, the words of the apostolic vocabu-

lary are ever and anon obtruded upon your hearing—and the whole stress of the argument is made to lie on such matters as sanctification; and the atonement; and the blood of the everlasting covenant; and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, who takes up his habitation in the soul of the believer; and salvation by grace; and the spirit of adoption poured forth on the heart, and filling it with all the peace and joy of a confident reconciliation; and the exercise of fellowship with the Father, and the Son; and the process of growing up unto Christ; and the habit of receiving out of his fulness, and of beholding with open face his glory, so as to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. We are not at present asking, if you feel the disgust with which unsubdued nature ever listens to these representations; or in what degree they are offensive to your taste, and painfully uncongenial with the whole style and habit of your literature. But we ask, if such terms and such phrases as have now been specified, do not spread before the eye of your mind an aspect of exceeding dimness over the preacher's demonstration? Does he not appear to you as if he wrapped himself up in the obscurity of a technical language, which you are utterly at a loss to comprehend? When the sermon is

question is put by the side of some lesson of obvious morality, or some exposition of those principles which are recognized and acted upon in ordinary life, does it not look to you as if it were shrouded from common observation altogether; and that ere you could be initiated into the mystery of such language, and of such doctrine, you would need to describe a mighty and still untrodden interval from all your present habits of conception? And yet, what if it be indeed the very language and the very doctrine of the New Testament?—if all the jargon that is charged on the interpretation of the word be the actual word itself?—and if the preacher be faithfully conveying the message of the Bible, at the very time that the hearer is shielding himself from the impression of it, by the saying, that he preacheth mysteries?

But to keep the two parties at a still more hopeless distance from each other,—the message of such a preacher, incomprehensible as many of its terms and many of its particulars may be, evidently bears a something upon it that is fitted to alarm the fears, and utterly to thwart the strongest tendencies of nature. Let him be just a faithful expounder of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and let the blindness of the natural man be what it may, still there is scarcely a hearer who can fail to perceive, that, anterior

to the reception of this Gospel, the preacher looks upon him as the enemy of God,—and strongly points at such a controversy between him and his Maker, as can only be made up through an appointed Mediator,—and requires of him such a faith as will transform his character, and as will shift the whole currency of his affections and desires,—and affirms the necessity of such a regeneration, as that all old things shall be done away, and all things shall become new;—and lets him know, that to be a Christian indeed he must die unto sense, he must be crucified unto the world, and, renouncing its charms and its predilections, must learn to have his conversation in heaven, and to choose God as the strength of his heart and his portion for evermore. All this flashes plainly and significantly enough, through that veil of mysticism which appears to overspread the general doctrine of the preacher; and imparts a forbidding character to it, in the eyes of those to whom we are alluding; and they will be glad of any pretence to shun a painful and a revolting contemplation; and they will complain of him on the very ground on which the Jews of old complained of Ezekiel, as a dealer in parables,—and while much of their antipathy is founded upon his being so strict and so spiritual, and so unaccommodating to the general tone of society,

one of the charges which will be most frequently and most loudly preferred against him, is that he is so very mysterious.

In the prosecution of the following discourse, we shall endeavour, in the first place, to state shortly, the ground on which the religion of the New Testament looks so mysterious a thing to the men of the world, and then conclude with a short practical remonstrance upon this subject.

I. There are certain experiences of human life so oft repeated, and so familiar to all our recollections, that when we perceive, or think we perceive, an analogy between them and the matters of religion, then religion does not appear to us to be mysterious. There is not a more familiar exhibition in society, than that of a servant who performs his allotted work, and who obtains his stipulated reward; and we are all servants, and one is our master, even God. There is nothing more common, than that a son should acquit himself to the satisfaction of his parents,—and we are all the children of an universal parent, whom it is our part to please in all things. Even when that son falls under displeasure, and is either visited with compunction, or made to receive the chastisement of his disobedience, there is nothing more common, than to witness the relentings of an earthly fa-

ther, and the readiness with which forgiveness is awarded on the repentance and sorrow of the offender,—and we, in like manner, liable to err from the pure law of heaven, have surely a kind and indulgent Father to deal with. And, lastly, there is nothing more common, than that the loyalty of a zealous and patriotic subject should be rewarded by the patronage, or at least, by the protection, of the civil magistrate,—and that an act of transgression against the laws, should be visited by an act of vengeance on the part of him who is a terror to evil doers, while a praise to such as do well. And thus it is too, that we are under a lawgiver in heaven, who is able both to save and to destroy. Now, so long as the work of religious instruction can be upheld by such analogies as these,—so long as the relations of civil or of domestic society can be employed to illustrate the relation between God and the creatures whom he has formed,—so long as the recollections of daily experience can thus be applied to the method of the divine administration,—a vein of perspicuity will appear to run through the clear and rational exposition of him who has put all the mist and all the technicals of an obscure theology away from him. All his lessons will run in an easy and direct train. Nor do we see how it is possible to be bewildered amongst such explanations, as

are suggested by the most ordinary doings and concerns of human society;—and did the preacher only confine himself to such doctrine, as that God rewards the upright, and punishes the rebellious, and upon the impulse of that compassion which belongs to him, takes again the penitent into acceptance, and in the great day of remuneration, will give unto every man according to his works,—did he only confine himself to truths so palpable, and build upon it applications so obvious, as just to urge us to the performance of duty by the promised reward, and deter us from the infraction of it by the severities of the threatened punishment, and call us to reformation by affectionately pleading with us the mercies of God, and warn us with all his force and all his fidelity, that should we persist in obstinate impenitence, we shall be cut off from happiness for ever,—there might be something to terrify,—but there would at least be nothing to darken or to perplex us in these interpretations,—nothing that would not meet common intelligence, and be helped forward by all the analogies of common observation,—and should this therefore prove the great burden of the preacher's demonstration, we should be the last to reproach him, as a dealer in parables, or as a dealer in mysteries.

To attach us the more to his rational style of

preaching, we cannot but perceive that it obtains a kind of experimental countenance from the actual distinctions of character which are realized in the peopled world around us. Can any thing be more evident, than that there is a line of separation between the sensual and the temperate, between the selfish and the disinterested, between the sordid and the honourable; or if you require a distinction more strictly religious, between the profane and the decent keeper of all the ordinances? Do not the former do, what in the matter of it, is contrary to the law of God, and the latter do, what in the matter of it, is agreeable to that law? Here then at once we witness the two grand divisions of human society, in a state of real and visible exemplification; and what more is necessary, than just to employ the most direct and intelligible motives of conduct, for persuading men to withdraw from one of these divisions, and pass over to the other of them? Surely it is just as we occupy the higher and the lower places in the scale of character, that we shall be found on the right and on the left hand of the Judge, on the day of reckoning. And what more obvious way then of preparing a people for eternity, than just to point our urgency to the one object of prevailing upon men to cross the line of separation, to cease from the iniqui-

ties which abound on the one side of it, and to put on the reformations which are practised on the other side of it? For this purpose, what else is to be done, than plainly to tell the whole amount of the interest and obligation which lies on the side of virtue, and as plainly to tell of the ruin and the degradation both of character and of prospect which lie on the side of vice,—to press the accomplishments of a good life on the one hand, and to denounce the falsehoods and the dishonesties, and the profligacies of a bad life on the other,—in a word, to make our hearers the good subjects of God, much in the same way, as you would purpose to make them the good servants of their master, or the good subjects of their government; and thus, by the simple and direct enforcements of duty, to shun all the difficulties of a scholastic theology, and to keep clear of all its mysteriousness?

It is needless to say how much this process is reversed by many a teacher of Christianity. It is true, that they hold out most prominently the need of some great transition; but it is a transition most mysteriously different from the act of crossing that line of separation, to which we have just been adverting. Without referring at all in fact to any such line, do they come forth from the very outset, with one sweeping denunciation of worthlessness and

guilt, which they carry round among all the varieties of character, and by which they affirm every individual of the human race, to be an undone sinner in the sight of God. Instead of bidding him look to other sinners less deformed by blemishes, and more rich in moral accomplishments, than himself, and then attempt to recover his distance from the divine favour by the imitation of them, they bid him think of the awful amount of debt and of deficiency that lies between the Lawgiver in heaven, and a whole world guilty before him. They speak of a depravity so entire, and of an alienation from God so deep, and so universal, as positively to obliterate that line of separation which is supposed to mark off those, who, upon the degree of their obedience, are rightful claimants to the honours of eternity, from those, who, upon the degree of their disobedience, are the wretched outcasts of condemnation. They reduce the men of all casts and of all characters, to the same footing of worthlessness in the sight of God; and speak of the evil of the human heart in such terms, as will sound to many a mysterious exaggeration, and, like the hearers of Ezekiel, will these not be able to comprehend the argument of the preacher, when he tells them, though in the very language of the Bible, that they are the heirs of wrath; that none of

them is righteous, no not one; that all flesh have corrupted their ways, and have fallen short of the glory of God; that the world at large is a lost and a fallen world, and that the natural inheritance of all who live in it, is the inheritance of a temporal death, and a ruined eternity.

When the preacher goes on in this strain, those hearers whom the Spirit has not convinced of sin will be utterly at a loss to understand him,—nor are we to wonder, if he seem to speak to them in a parable, when he speaks of the disease,—that all the darkness of a parable should still seem to hang over his demonstrations, when, as a faithful expounder of the revealed will and counsel of God, he proceeds to tell them of the remedy. For God hath not only made known the fearful magnitude of his reckoning against us. But he has prescribed, and with that authority which only belongs to him, the way of its settlement; and he has told us, that all the works and all the efforts of unrenewed nature are of no avail, in gaining us acceptance, and that he has laid the burden of our atonement on him who alone was able to bear it; and he not only invites, but he commands, and he beseeches us, to enter into peace and pardon on the footing of that expiation which Christ hath made, and of that righteousness which Christ hath wrought out for us;

and he further declares, that we have come into the world with such a moral constitution, as will not merely need to be repaired, but as will need to be changed or made over again, ere we be meet for the inheritance of the saints; and still for this object does he point our eyes to the great Mediator, who has undertaken, not merely for the forgiveness, but who has undertaken for the sanctification of all who put their trust in him; and he announces, that out of his fulness there ever come forth supplies of strength, for the new obedience of new creatures in Jesus Christ our Lord. Now it is when the preacher is unfolding this scheme of salvation,—it is when he is practically applying it to the conscience and the conduct of his hearers,—it is when the terms of grace, and faith, and sanctification, are pressed into frequent employment for the work of these very peculiar explanations,—it is, when instead of illustrating his subject by those analogies of common life, which might have done for men of an untainted nature, but which will not do for the men of this corrupt world, he faithfully unfolds that economy of redemption which God hath actually set up for the recovery of our degenerate species,—it is then, that to a hearer still in darkness, the whole argument sounds as strangely and as obscurely, as if it were con-

veyed to him in an unknown language,—it is then, that the repulsion of his nature to the truth, as it is in Jesus, finds a willing excuse in the utter mysteriousness of its articles, and its terms; and gladly does he put away from him the unwelcome message, with the remark, that he who delivers it, is a speaker of parables, and there is no comprehending him.

It will readily occur as an observation upon all that has been delivered, that, by the great majority of hearers, this imputation of mysteriousness is never preferred,—that, in fact, they are most habituated to this style of preaching, —and that they recognize the very thing which they value most, and are best acquainted with, when they hear a sermon replete with the doctrine, and abounding in the terms, and uttered in the cadence of orthodoxy. Of this we are perfectly aware. The point to carry with the great bulk of hearers is, not to conquer their disgust at the form of sound words, but to conquer their resistance to the power of them; to alarm them by the consideration, that the influence of the lesson is altogether a distinct matter from the pleasantness of the song,—that their ready and delighted acquiescence in the preaching of the faith, may consist with a total want of obedience to the faith,—and that with all the love they bear to the phraseology of the gospel,

and all their preference for its ministers, and all their attendance upon its sacraments, the kingdom of God, however much it may have come to them in word, may not at all have come to them in power. This is a distinct error from the one we have been combating,—a weed which grows abundantly in another quarter of the field altogether,—a perverseness of mind, more deceitful than the other, and perhaps still more unmanageable, and against which, the faithful minister has to set himself amongst that numerous class of professors, who like to hear of the faith, but never apply a single practical test to the question, Am I in the faith? who like to hear of regeneration, but never put the question, Am I really regenerated? who like to hear that without Christ they can do nothing, but may be enabled to do all things through him strengthening them,—but never enter into the important personal inquiry, Is he really strengthening me, and am I, by my actual victory over the world, and my actual progress in the accomplishments of personal Christianity, bearing evidence upon myself that I have a real part and interest in these things?

There can be no doubt as to the existence of such a class,—and under another text, there could be no difficulty in finding out a scriptural application, by which to reach and to reprove

them. But the matter suggested by the present text, is, that if a minister of the present day should preach as the Apostles did before him, —if the great theme of his administrations be Jesus Christ, and him crucified,—if the doctrine of the sermon be a faithful transcript of the doctrine of the New Testament,—there is one class, we have every warrant for believing, from whom the word will not return unto him void,—and there is another class who will be the willing hearers, but not the obedient doers of the word. But there is still a third class, made up of men of cultivated literature, and men of polished and respectable society, and men of a firm secular intelligence in all the ordinary matters of business, who, at the same time, possessing no sympathies whatever with the true spirit and design of Christianity, are exceedingly shut up, in all the avenues both of their heart and understanding, against the peculiar teaching of the gospel. Like the hearers of Ezekiel, they feel an impression of mysteriousness. There is a certain want of adjustment between the truth as it is in Jesus, and the prevailing style of their conceptions. All their views of human life, and all the lessons they may have gathered from the school of civil or of classical morality, and all their preferences for what they count the clearness and the ration-

ality of legal preaching, and all the predelictions they have gotten in its favour, from the most familiar analogies in human society,—all these, coupled with their utter blindness to the magnitude of that guilt which they have incurred under the judgment of a spiritual law, enter as so many elements of dislike in their hearts, towards the whole tone and character of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. And they go to envelope the subject in such a shroud of mysticism to their eyes, that many of the preachers of the gospel are, by them, resisted on the same plea with the prophet of old, to whom his contemptuous countrymen meant to attach the ridicule and the ignominy of a proverb, when they said,—he is a dealer in parables.

We mistake the matter, if we think that the offence of the cross has yet ceased from the land. We mistake it, if we think that the persecution of contempt, a species of persecution more appalling to some minds than even direct and personal violence, is not still the appointed trial of all who would live godly, and of all who would expound zealously and honestly the doctrine of Christ Jesus our Lord. We utterly mistake it, if we think that Christianity is not even to this very hour the same very peculiar thing that it was in the days of the Apostles,—

that it does not as much signalize and separate us from a world lying in wickedness,—that the reproach cast upon Paul, that he was mad, because he was an intrepid follower of Christ, is not still ready to be preferred against every faithful teacher, and every consistent disciple of the faith,—and that, under the terms of methodism, and fanaticism, and mysticism, there is not ready to be discharged upon them, from the thousand batteries of a hostile and unbelieving world, as abundant a shower of invective and contumely as in the first ages.

II. Now, if there be any hearers present who feel that we have spoken to them, when we spoke of the resistance which is held out against peculiar Christianity, on the ground of that mysteriousness in which it appears to be concealed from all ordinary discernment,—we should like to take our leave of them at present with two observations.—We ask them, in the first place, if they have ever, to the satisfaction of their own minds, disproved the Bible,—and if not, we ask them how they can sit at ease, should all the mysteriousness which they charge upon Evangelical truth, and by which they would attempt to justify their contempt for it, be found to attach to the very language, and to the very doctrine of God's own com-

munication? What if it be indeed the truth of God? What if it be the very language of the offended Lawgiver? What if they be the only overtures of reconciliation, upon the acceptance of which a sinner can come nigh unto him?—Now he actually does say that no man cometh unto the Father but by the Son,—and that his is the only name given under heaven whereby men can be saved, and that he will be magnified only in the appointed Mediator,—and that Christ is all in all,—and that there is no other foundation on which man can lay,—and that he who believeth on him shall not be confounded. He further speaks of our personal preparation for heaven; and here, too, may his utterance sound mysteriously in your hearing, as he tells that without holiness no man can see God,—and that we are without strength while we are without the Spirit to make us holy,—and that unless a man be born again he shall not enter into the kingdom of God,—and that he should wrestle in prayer for the washing of regeneration,—and that he should watch for the Holy Ghost with all perseverance,—and that he should aspire at being perfect through Christ strengthening him,—and that he should, under the operation of those great provisions which are set up in the New Testament for creating us anew unto good works, conform himself

unto that doctrine of grace by which he is brought to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present evil world, We again ask them, if all this be offensive to their taste, and utterly revolting to their habits and inclinations, and if they turn with disgust from the bitterness of such an application, and can behold no strength to constrain them in any such arguments, and no eloquence to admire in them. With what discernment truly is your case taken up in this very Bible, whose phraseology and whose doctrine are so unpalatable to you, when it tells us of the preaching of the cross being foolishness, —but remember that it says it is foolishness to those who perish; when it tells of the natural man receiving of the things of the Spirit,—but remember that it says, if ye have not the Spirit of God, ye are none of his; when it tells of the gospel being hid,—but hid to them who are lost: " In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of those which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Secondly, let us assure the men, who at this moment bid the stoutest defiance to the message of the gospel,—the men whose natural taste appears to offer an invincible barrier

against the reception of its truths,—the men who, upon the plea of mysteriousness, or the plea of fanaticism, or the plea of excessive and unintelligible peculiarity, are most ready to repudiate the whole style and doctrine of the New Testament,—let us assure them that the time may yet come, when they shall render to this very gospel the most striking of all acknowledgments, even by sending to the door of its most faithful ministers, and humbly craving from them their explanations and their prayers. It indeed offers an affecting contrast to all the glory of earthly prospects, and to all the vigour of confident and rejoicing health, and to all the activity and enterprise of business, when the man who made the world his theatre, and felt his mountain to stand strong on the fleeting foundation of its enjoyments and its concerns,—when he comes to be bowed down with infirmity, or receives from the trouble within, the solemn intimation that death is now looking to him in good earnest: when such a man takes him to the bed of sickness, and he knows it to be a sickness unto death, when, under all the weight of breathlessness and pain, he listens to the man of God, as he points the way that leadeth to eternity,—what, I would ask, is the kind of gospel that is most fitted to charm the sense of guilt and the anticipations of ven-

geance away from him? Sure we are, that we never in these affecting circumstances—through which you have all too pass—we never saw the man who could maintain a stability, and a hope, from the sense of his own righteousness; but who, if leaning on the righteousness of Christ, could mix a peace and an elevation with his severest agonies. We never saw the expiring mortal who could look with an undaunted eye on God as his lawgiver; but often has all its langour been lighted up with joy at the name of Christ as his Saviour. We never saw the dying acquaintance, who, upon the retrospect of his virtues and of his doings, could prop the tranquillity of his spirit on the expectation of a legal reward. O no! this is not the element which sustains the tranquillity of death-beds. It is the hope of forgiveness. It is a believing sense of the efficacy of the atonement. It is the prayer of faith, offered up in the name of him who is the Captain of all our salvation. It is a dependence on that power which can alone impart a meetness for the inheritance of the saints, and present the spirit, holy, and unreprovable, and unblamable, in the sight of God.

Now, what we have to urge, is, that if these be the topics, which, on the last half hour of your life, are the only ones that will possess, in your judgment, any value or substantial impor-

tance, why put them away from you now? You will recur to them then, and for what? That you may get the forgiveness of your sins. But there is a something else you must get, ere you can obtain an entrance into peace or glory. You must get the renovation of that nature, which is so deeply tainted at this moment with the guilt of ingratitude and forgetfulness towards God. This must be gone through ere you die; and say, if a change so mighty should be wantonly postponed to the hour of dying?—when all your refusals of the gospel have hardened and darkened the mind against it; when a demonstration of the Spirit, then, is surely not to be counted on, as the return that you will experience for resisting all his intimations now; when the effects of the alienation of a whole life, both in the extinguishing the light of your conscience, and in riveting your distaste for holiness, will be accumulated into such a barrier in the way of your return to God, as stamps upon death-bed conversions, a grievous unlikelihood, and should give an imperious force to the call of "To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, seeing that now is your accepted time, and now is your day of salvation."

SERMON III.

THE PREPARATION NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL.

MATTHEW xiii. 11, 12.

"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

IT is of importance to mark the principle of distribution on which it is given to some to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and it is not given to others. Both may at the outset be equally destitute of a clear understanding of these mysteries. But the former may have what the latter have not. With the former, there may be a desire for explanation; with the latter, there may be no such desire. The former may, in the earnest prosecution of this de-

sire, be praying earnestly, and reading diligently, and striving laboriously, to do all that they know to be the will of God. With the latter, there may be neither the habit of prayer, nor the habit of inquiry, nor the habit of obedience. To the one class will be given what they have not. From the other class what they have shall be taken away. We have already attempted to excite, in the latter class, a respectful attention to the truths of the gospel, and shall now confine ourselves chiefly to the object of encouraging and directing those who feel the mysteriousness of these truths, and long for light to arise in the midst of it;—shall address ourselves to those who have an honest anxiety after that truth which is unto salvation, but find the way to it beset with many doubts and many perplexities,—to those who are impressed with a general conviction on the side of Scripture, but in whose eyes a darkness impenetrable still broods over its pages,—to those who are haunted by a sense of the imperious necessity of religion, and, at the same time, cannot escape from the impression, that if it is any where to be found, it is to be found within the records of the Old and New Testament, but from whose heart, in the reading of these records, the veil still remains untaken away.

In the further prosecution of this discourse,

let us attempt, in the first place, to explain what it is that we ought to have, in order to attain an understanding of the mysteries of the gospel; and, in the second place, how it is, that in many cases, these mysteries are evolved upon the mind in a clear and convincing manifestation.

I. First, then, we ought to have an honest desire after light, and if we have this desire, it will not remain unproductive. There is a connexion repeatedly announced to us in Scripture, between desire upon this subject, and its accomplishment. He that willeth to do the will of God shall know of my doctrine. He who hungereth and thirsteth shall be filled. He who lacketh wisdom, and is desirous of obtaining it, let him vent his desire in prayer,—and if it be the prayer of confidence in God, his desire shall be given him. There are thousands to whom the Bible is a sealed book, and who are satisfied that it should remain so, who share in the impetuous contempt of the Pharisees against a doctrine to which they are altogether blind, who have no understanding of the matter, and no wish that it should be otherwise, —and unto them, it will not be given, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. They have not, and from them, therefore, shall be

taken away, even that which they have. There are others, again, who have an ardent and unquenchable thirst after the mysteries of the gospel; who, like the prophet in the Apocalypse, weep much because the book is not opened to them; who complain of darkness, like the Apostles of old, when they expostulated with their Teacher, because he spoke in parables; and, like them, who go to him with their requests for an explanation. These shall find that what they cannot do for themselves, the Lion of the tribe of Judah will do for them. He will prevail to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof. There is something they already have, even an honest wish to be illuminated, and to this more will be given. They are awake to the desirableness, they are awake to the necessity, of a revelation which they have not yet gotten,—and to them belongs the promise of, Awake, O sinner, and Christ shall give thee light.

Secondly, We ought to have a habit of prayer conjoined with a habit of inquiry; and to this more will be given. We have already adverted to the circumstance, that it is in the Bible, and not out of the Bible, where this light is to be met with. It is by the Spirit of God, shining upon the word of God, that his truth is reflected with clearness upon the soul. It is

by his operation that the characters of this book are made to stand as visibly out to the eye of the understanding, as they do to the eye of the body; and, therefore, it is evident that it is not in the act of looking away from the written revelation, but in the act of looking towards it, that the wished-for illumination will at length come into the mind of an inquirer. Let your present condition, then, be that of a darkness as helpless and as unattainable as can possibly be imagined, there still remains an obvious and practical direction, which you can be doing with in the mean time. You can persevere in the exercise of reading your Bible. There you are at the place of meeting between the Spirit of God, and your own spirit. You may have to wait, as if at the pool of Siloam; but the many calls of the Bible to wait upon God, to wait upon him with patience, to wait and to be of good courage, all prove that this waiting is a frequent and a familiar part of that process, by which a sinner finds his way out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel.

And we have also adverted already, though in a very general way, to the difference in point of result, between the active inquiries of a man who looks forward to the acquisition of saving truth, as the natural and necessary termination

of his inquiries, and of a man who mingles with every personal attempt after this object, the exercise of prayer, and a reverential sense of his dependence on God. The latter is just as active, and just as inquisitive as the former. The difference between them does not lie in the one putting forth diligence, without a feeling of dependence, and the other feeling dependence, without a putting forth of diligence. He who is in the right path towards the attainment of light, combines both these properties. It is through the avenues of a desirous heart, and of an exercised understanding, and of sustained attention, and of faculties in quest of truth, and labouring after the possession of it, that God sends into the mind his promised manifestations. All this exercise, on the one hand, without such an acknowledgment of him as leads to prayer, will be productive of nothing in the way of spiritual discernment. And prayer, without this exercise, is the mere form and mockery of an acknowledgment. He who calls upon us to hearken diligently, when he addresses us by a living voice, does in effect call upon us to read and to ponder diligently, when he addresses us by a written message. To ask truth of God, while we neglect to do for this object what he bids us, is, in fact, not to recognize God, but to insult him. It is to hold out the appearance

of presenting ourselves before him, while we are not doing it at the place of meeting which he has assigned for us. It is to address an imaginary Being, whom we have invested with a character of our own conception, and not the Being who bids us search his Scriptures, and incline unto his testimonies, and stir ourselves up that we may lay hold of him. Such prayer is utterance, and nothing more. It wants all the substantial characters of prayer. It may amount to the seeking of those who shall not be able to enter the strait gate. It falls short of the striving of those who take the kingdom of heaven by force, and of whom that kingdom suffereth violence.

He who, without prayer, looks confidently forward to success as the fruit of his own investigations, is not walking humbly with God. If he were humble he would pray: But whether is he the more humble who joins with a habit of prayer, all those accompanying circumstances which God hath prescribed, or he who, in neglect of these circumstances, ventures himself into his presence in the language of supplication? There may be the show of humility in confiding the whole cause of our spiritual and saving illumination to the habit of praying for it to God. But if God himself tell us, that we must read, and seek, and meditate, then it is no

longer humility to keep by the solitary exercise of praying. It is, in fact, keeping pertinaciously by our own way, heedless of his will and his way altogether. It is approaching God in the pride of our own understanding. It is detaching from the whole work of seeking after him some of those component parts which he himself hath recommended. In the very act of making prayer stand singly out as the alone instrument of success, we are in fact drawing the life and the spirit out of prayer itself; and causing it to wither into a thing of no power and no significancy in the sight of God. It is not the prayer of acknowledgment, unless it come from him who acknowledges the will of God in other things as well as in prayer. It is not the prayer of submission, unless it come from the heart of a man who manifests a principle of submission in all things.

Thirdly, We ought to do all that we know to be God's will, and to this habit of humble, earnest, desirous reformation, more will be given.

We trust that what has been said will prepare you for the reception of another advice besides that of reading or praying for the attainment of that manifestation which you are in quest of,—and that is, doing. There is an alarm raised in many a heart at the very suggestion of doing for an inquirer, lest he should be misled as

to the ground of his justification; lest among the multitude or the activity of his works, he should miss the truth, that a man is accepted, not through the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ; lest by every one performance of duty, he should just be adding another stone to the fabric of a delusive confidence, and presumptuously trying to force his own way to heaven, without the recognition of the gospel or any of its peculiarities. Now, doing stands precisely in the same relation to prayer that reading does. Without the one or the other it is the prayer either of presumption or hypocrisy. If he both read and pray, it is far more likely that he will be brought unto the condition of a man being justified through faith in Christ, than that he will rest his hopes before God in the mere exercise of reading. If he both do and pray, it is far more likely that he will come to be established in the righteousness of Christ, as the foundation of all his trust, than that he will rest upon his own righteousness. For a man to give up sin at the outset, is just to do what God wills him at the outset. For a man at the commencement of his inquiries, to be strenuous in the relinquishment of all that he knows to be evil, is just to enter on the path of approach toward Christ, in the very way that Christ desires him. He who cometh unto me must for-

sake all. For a man to put forth an immediate hand to the doing of the commandments, while he is groping his way towards a firm basis on which he might rear his security before God, is not to deviate or diverge from the Saviour. He may do it with an eye of most intense earnestness towards the Saviour,—and while the artificial interpreter of Christ's doctrine holds him to be wrong, Christ himself may recognise him to be one of those who keep his sayings, and to whom therefore he stands pledged to manifest himself. The man in fact by strenuously doing, is just the more significantly and the more energetically praying. He is adding one ingredient to the business of seeking, without which the other ingredient would be in God's sight an abomination. He is struggling against all regard to iniquity in his heart, seeing that if he have this regard God will not hear him. To say, that it is dangerous to tell a man in these circumstances to do, lest he rest in his doings and fall short of the Saviour, is to say, that it would be dangerous to place a man on the road to his wished-for home, lest when he has got upon the road, he should stand still and be satisfied. The more, in fact, that the man's conscience is exercised and enlightened, (and what more fitted than wilful sin to deafen the voice of conscience altogether?) the less will it

let him alone, and the more will it urge him onward to that righteousness which is the only one commensurate to God's law, and in which alone, the holy and inflexible God can look upon him with complacency. Let him humbly betake himself, then, to the proscribed path of reading, and prayer, and obvious reformation, —and let us see if there do not evolve upon his mind, in the prosecution of it, the worthlessness of all that man can do for his meritorious acceptance with the Lawgiver; and the deep ungodliness of character which adheres to him; and the suitableness of Christ's atonement to all his felt necessities, and all his moral aspirations; and the need in which he stands of a regenerating influence, to make him a willing and a spiritual subject of God. Let us see whether, though the light which he at length receives be marvellous, the way is not plain which leads to it; and whether, though nature be compassed about with a darkness which no power of nature can dissipate,—there is not a clear and obvious procedure, by the steps of which, the most alienated of her children may be carried onwards to all the manifestations of the kingdom of grace, and to the discernment of all its mysteries.

Though, to the natural eye, then, the doctrine of Christ be not plain, the way is plain by which we arrive at it. Though, ere we see the

things of Christ, the Spirit must take of them and show them unto us,—yet this Spirit deals out such admonitions to all, that, if we follow them, he will not cease to enlarge, and to extend his teaching, till we have obtained a saving illumination. He is given to those who obey him. He abandons those who resist him. When conscience tells us to read, and to pray, and to reform, it is he who is prompting this faculty. It is he who is sending through this organ, the whispers of his own voice to the ear of the inner man. If we go along with the movement, he will follow it up by other movements. He will visit him who is the willing subject of his first influences by higher demonstrations. He will carry forward his own work in the heart of that man, who, while acting upon the suggestions of his own moral sense, is in fact acting in conformity to the warnings of this kind and faithful monitor. So that the Holy Spirit will connect his very first impulses on the mind of that inquirer, who under the reign of earnestness, has set himself to read his Bible, and to knock with importunity at the door of heaven, and to forsake the evil of his ways, and to turn him to the practice of all that he knows to be right,—the Spirit will connect these incipient measures of a seeker after Zion, with the acquirement of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.

Let it not be said, then, that because the doctrine of Christ is shrouded in mystery to the general eye of the world, it is such a mystery as renders it inaccessible to the men of the world. Even to them does the trumpet of invitation blow a certain sound. They may not yet see the arcana of the temple, but they may see the road which leads to the temple. If they are never to obtain admission there, it is not because they cannot; but because they will not, come to it. "Ye will not come to me," says the Saviour, "that ye might have life." Reading, and prayer, and reformation, these are all obvious things; and it is the neglect of these obvious things which involves them in the guilt and the ruin of those who neglect the great salvation. This salvation is to be found of those who seek after it. The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, which is life everlasting, is a knowledge open and acquirable to all. And, on the day of judgment, there will not be found a single instance of a man condemned because of unbelief, who sought to the uttermost of his opportunities; and evinced the earnestness of his desire after peace with God, by doing all that he might have done, and by being all that he might have been.

Be assured, then, that it will be for want of seeking, if you do not find. It will be for want

of learning, if you are not taught. It will be for want of obedience to the movements of your own conscience, if the Holy Ghost, who prompts and who stimulates the conscience to all its movements, be not poured upon you, in one large and convincing manifestation. It may still be the day of small things with you—a day despised by the accomplished adepts of a systematic and articled theology. But God will not despise it. He will not leave your longings for ever unsatisfied. He will not keep you standing always at the threshold of vain desires and abortive endeavours. That faith, which is the gift of God, you have already attained in a degree, if you have obtained a general conviction of the importance and reality of the whole matter. He will increase that faith. Act up to the light that you have gotten, by reading earnestly, and praying importunately, and striving laboriously,—and to you more will be given. You will at length obtain a clear and satisfying impression of the things of God, and the things of salvation. Christ will be recognised in all his power and in all his preciousness. You will know what it is to be established upon him. The natural legality of your hearts will give way to the pure doctrine of acceptance with God, through faith in the blood of a crucified Saviour. The sanctifying influence of such a faith will

not merely be talked of in word, but be experienced in power; and you will evince that you are God's workmanship in Christ Jesus, by your abounding in all those fruits of righteousness which are through him, to the praise and glory of the Father.

II. We shall now attempt to explain, how it is that the mysteries of the gospel are, in many cases, evolved upon the mind in a clear and convincing manifestation.

And here let it be distinctly understood, that the way in many cases may be very far from the way in all cases. The experiencc of converts is exceedingly various,—nor do we know a more frequent, and at the same time a more groundless cause of anxiety, than that by which the mind of an inquirer is often harassed, when he attempts to realize the very process by which another has been called out of darkness to the marvellous light of the gospel.

Referring, then, to those grounds of mysteriousness which we have already specified in a former discourse,—God may so manifest himself to the mind of an inquirer, as to convince him, that all those analogies of common life which are taken from the relation of a servant to his master, or of a son to his father, or of a subject to his sovereign, utterly fail in the case

of man, as he is by nature, in relation to his God. A servant may discharge all his obligations; a son may acquit himself of all his duties, or may with his occasional failures, and his occasional chastisement still keep his place in the instinctive affection of his parents; and a subject may persevere in unseduced loyalty to the earthly government under which he lives. But the glaring and the demonstrable fact with regard to man, viewed as a creature, is, that the habit of his heart is one continued habit of dislike and resistance to the Creator who gave him birth. The earthly master may have all those services rendered to which he has a right, and so be satisfied. The earthly father may have all the devotedness, and all the attachment, from his family, which he can desire, and so be satisfied. The earthly sovereign may have all that allegiance from a loyal subject, who pays his taxes, and never transgresses his laws, which he expects or cares for, and so be satisfied. But go upward from them to the God who made us,—to the God who keeps us,—to the God in whom we live, and move, and have our being,—to the God whose care and whose presence are ever surrounding us, who from morning to night, and from night to morning, watches over us, and tends us while we sleep, and guides us in our waking moments, and

follows us to the business of the world, and brings us back in safety to our homes, and never for a single instant of time withdraws from us the superintendence of an eye that never slumbers, and of a hand that is never weary. Now, all we require is a fair estimate of the claims of such a God. Does he ask too much, when he asks the affections of a heart that receives its every beat, and its every movement from the impulse of his power? Does he ask too much, when he asks the devotedness of a life, which owes its every hour and its every moment to him whose right hand preserves us continually? Has he no right to complain, when he knocks at the door of our hearts, and, trying to possess himself of the love and the confidence of his own creatures, he finds that all their thoughts, and all their pursuits, and all their likings, are utterly away from him? Is there no truth, and no justice, in the charge which he prefers against us,—when, surrounded as we are by the gifts of nature and of providence, all of which are his, the Giver is meanwhile forgotten, and amid the enjoyments of his bounty, we live without him in the world? If it indeed be true, that it is his sun which lights us on our path, and his earth on which we tread so firmly, and his air which circulates a freshness around our dwellings, and his rain which feeds all the luxuriance that is

spread around us, and drops upon every field the smiling promise of abundance for all the wants of his dependent children,—if all this be true, can it at the same time be right, that this all-providing God should have so little a place in our remembrance? that the whole man should be otherwise engaged, than with a sense of him, and the habitual exercise of acknowledgment to him? that in fact the full play of his regards should be expended on the things which are formed, and through the whole system of his conduct and his affairs, there should be so utter a neglect of him who formed them? Surely if this be the true description of man, and the character of his heart in reference to God, then it is a case of too peculiar a nature to be illustrated by any of the analogies of human society. It must be taken up on its own grounds; and should the injured and offended Lawgiver offer to make it the subject of any communication, it is our part humbly to listen and implicitly to follow it.

And here it is granted, that amongst the men who are utter strangers to this communication, you meet with the better and the worse; and that there is an obvious line of distinction which marks off the base and the worthless amongst them, from those of them who are the valuable and the accomplished members of society. And

yet do we aver, that one may step over that line and not be nearer than he was to God,—that, between the men on either side of it, and Him who created them, there lies an untrodden gulph of separation,—that, with all the justice which rules their transactions, and all the honour which animates their bosoms, and all the compassion which warms their hearts, and streams forth either in tears of pity, or in acts of kindness, upon the miserable,—with all these virtues which they do have, and which serve both to bless and to adorn the condition of humanity, there is one virtue, which, prior to the reception and the influence of the gospel of Christ, they most assuredly do not have,—they are utterly devoid of godliness. They have no desire, and no inclination towards God. There may be the dread of him, and the occasional remembrance of him; but there is no affection for him. This is the charge which we carry round amongst all the sons and daughters of Adam, who have not submitted themselves to the only name that is given under heaven whereby men can be saved. We are not denying that the persons of some of them are dignified by the more respectable attributes of character; and that, from the persons of others of them, there are beauteously reflected the more amiable and endearing attributes of character. But we affirm, that, with all

these random varieties of moral exhibition which are to be found—the principle of loyalty to God has lost the hold of a presiding influence over all the children of our degraded and undone nature. We ask you to collect all the scattered remnant of what is great, and of what is graceful in accomplishments that may have survived the fall of our first parents; and we pronounce, of the whole assemblage, that they go not to alleviate, by one iota, the burden of that controversy which lies between God and their posterity,—that throughout all the ranks and diversities of character which prevail in the world, there is one pervading affection of enmity to him,—that the man of talents forgets that he has nothing which he did not receive, and so, courting, by some lofty enterprise of mind, the gaze of this world's admiration, he renounces his God, and makes an idol of his fame,—that the man of ambition feels not how subordinate he is to the might and the majesty of his Creator, but turning away all his reverence from him, falls down to the idol of power,—that the man of avarice withdraws all his trust from the living God, and, embarking all his desire in the pursuit of riches, and all his security in the possession of them, he makes an idol of wealth, —that, descending from these to the average and the every-day members of our world's

population, we see each walking after the counsel of his own heart, and in the sight of his own eyes, with every wish directed to the objects of time, and every hope bounded by his anticipations. And, amid all the love they bear to their families, and all the diligence they give to their business, and all the homage of praise and attachment they obtain from their friends, are they so surrounded by the influences of what is seen and what is sensible, that the invisible God is scarcely ever thought of, and his character not at all dwelt on with delight, and his will never admitted to an habitual and a practical ascendency over their conduct, so as to make it true of all, and of every one of us, that there is none who understandeth, and none who seeketh after God.

Now, if a man do not see this case made out against himself, in all its enormity, he will feel that the man who talks of it, and who proposes the gospel application to it, talketh mysteriously. If the Spirit have not convinced him of sin, and he have not learned to submit his character to the lofty standard of a law which offers to subordinate to the will of God, not merely the whole habit of his outward history, but also the whole habit of his inward affections, both the disease and the remedy are alike unknown to him. His character may be fair and respectable in the

eyes of men; but it will not carry upon it one feature of that spirituality and holiness, and relish for those exercises that have God for their immediate object, which assimilate men to angels, and make them meet for the joys of eternity. His morality will be the morality of life, and his virtues will be the virtues of the world; and all the mystery of a parable, or of a dark saying, will appear to hang over the terms and the explanations of that gospel, against the light of which, the god of this world blindeth the minds of those who believe not.

Let us therefore reflect, that the principle on which the peculiarities of the gospel look so mysterious, is just the feeling which nature has of its own sufficiency; and, that you may renounce this delusive feeling altogether, we ask you to think, how totally destitute you are of that which God chiefly requires of you. He requires your heart, and we venture to say of every man amongst you, who has heretofore lived in neglect of the great salvation, that his heart, with all its objects and affections, is away from God,—that it is not a sense of obligation to him, which forms the habitual and the presiding influence of its movements,—that therefore, every day and every hour of your history in the world, accumulates upon you the guilt of a disobedience of a far deeper and more offen-

sive character than even the disobedience of your more notorious and external violations. There is ever with you, lying folded in the recesses of your bosom, and pervading the whole system both of your desires and of your doings, that which gives to sin all its turpitude, and all its moral hideousness in the sight of God. There is a rooted preference of the creature to the Creator. There is a full desire after the gift, and a listless ingratitude towards the Giver. There is an utter devotedness, in one shape or other, to the world that is to be burnt up,—and an utter forgetfulness, amid all your forms, and all your decencies, of Him who endureth for ever. There is that universal attribute of the carnal mind—enmity against God; and we affirm, that, with this distaste in your hearts towards him, you, on every principle of a spiritual and intelligent morality, are as chargeable with rebellion against your Maker, as if some apostate angel had been your champion, and you warred with God, under the waving standards of defiance. It was to clear away the guilt of this monstrous iniquity that Christ died. It was to make it possible for God, with his truth unviolated, and his holiness untarnished, and all the high attributes of his eternal and unchangeable nature unimpaired, to hold out forgiveness to the world,—that propitiation was

made through the blood of his own Son, even that God might be just, while the justifier of them who believe in Jesus. It is to make it possible for man to love the Being whom nature taught him to hate and to fear, that God now lifts, from his mercy-seat, a voice of the most beseeching tenderness, and smiles upon the world as God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses. It was utterly to shift the moral constitution of our minds,—an achievement beyond any power of humanity,—that the Saviour, after he died and rose again, obtained the promise of the Father, even that Spirit, through whom alone the fixed and radical disease of nature can be done away. And thus, by the ministration of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, does he undertake not only to improve, but to change us,—not only to repair, but to re-make us,—not only to amend our evil works, but to create us anew unto good works, that we may be the workmanship of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. These are the leading and essential peculiarities of the New Testament. This is the truth of Christ; though to the general mind of the world, it is the truth of Christ in a mystery. These are the parables which the commissioned messengers of grace are to deal out to the sinful children of Adam; and dark as they may ap-

pear, or disgusting as they may sound in the ears of those who think that they are rich, and have need of nothing, they are the very articles upon which hope is made to beam on the heart of a converted sinner, and peace is restored to him,—and acceptance with God is secured by the terms of an unalterable covenant,—and the only effective instruments of a vital and substantial reformation are provided: so that he who before was dead in trespasses and sins, is quickened together with Christ, and made alive unto God, and renewed again after his image, and enabled to make constant progress in all the graces of a holy and spiritual obedience.

SERMON IV.

AN ESTIMATE OF THE MORALITY THAT IS WITHOUT GODLINESS.

Job ix. 30—33.

"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both."

To the people of every Christian country, the doctrine of a Mediator between God and man is familiarized by long possession, though to many of them it be nothing more than the familiarity of a name, recognised as a well known sound by the ear, without sending one fruitful or substantial thought into the understanding. For, let it be observed, that the listless acquiescence of the mind, in a doctrine, to the statement or to the explanation of which it

has been long habituated, is a very different thing from the actual hold which the mind takes of the doctrine; insomuch that it is very possible for a man to be a lover of orthodoxy, and to sit with complacency under its ministers, and to be revolted by the heresies of those who would either darken or deny any of its articles, —and, in a word, to be most tenacious in his preference for that form of words to which he has been accustomed; while, to the meaning of the words themselves, the whole man is in a state of entire dormancy, and delighted though he really be by the utterance of the truth, exhibits not in his person, or in his history, one evidence of that practical ascendency, which Christian truth is sure to exert over the heart and the habits of every genuine believer.

In the midst of all this dimness, and all this indolence about the realities of salvation, it is refreshing to view the workings of a mind that is in earnest; and of a mind too, which, instead of being mechanically carried forward in the track of a prescribed or authoritative orthodoxy, is prompted to all its aspirations by a deep feeling of guilt, and of necessity. Such we conceive to have been the mind of Job, to whom the doctrine of a Redeemer had not been explicitly unfolded, but who seems at times to have been favoured with a prophetic glimpse of

him through the light of a dim and distant futurity. The state of his body, covered as it was with disease, makes him an object of sympathy. But there is a still deeper and more attractive sympathy excited by the state of his soul, labouring under the visitation of a hand that was too heavy for him; called out to a combat with God, and struggling to maintain it; at one time, tempted to measure the justice of his cause with the righteousness of Heaven's dispensations; at another, closing his complaint with the murmurs of a despairing acquiescence; and at length brought, through all the varieties of an exercised and agitated spirit, to submit himself to God, and to repent in dust and in ashes.

There is a darkness in the book of Job. He, at one time, under the soreness of his calamity, gives way to impatience; and, at another, he seems to recall the hasty utterance of his more distempered moments. He, in one place, fills his mouth with arguments; and, in another, he appears willing to surrender them all, and to decline the unequal struggle of man contending with his Maker. He is evidently oppressed throughout by a feeling of want, without the full understanding of an adequate or an appropriate remedy. Now, it does give a higher sense of the value of this remedy, when we are

made to witness the unsatisfied longings of one who lived in a dark and early period of the world,—when we hear him telling, as he does in these verses, where the soreness lies, and obscurely guessing at the ministration that is suited to it,—nor do we know a single passage of the Bible, which carries home with greater effect the necessity of a mediator, than that where Job, on his restless bed, is set before us, wearying himself in the hopeless task of arguing with God, and calling for some day's-man betwixt them, who might lay his hand upon them both.

The afflictions which were heaped upon Job made him doubt his acceptance with his Maker. This was the great burden of his complaint, and the recovery of this acceptance was the theme of many a fruitless and fatiguing speculation. We have one of these speculations in the verses which are now submitted to you; and as they are four in number, so there is such a distinction in the subjects of them, that the passage naturally resolves itself into four separate topics of illustration. In the 30th verse, we have an expedient proposed by Job, for the purpose of obtaining the acceptance which he longed after: "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean." In the 31st verse, we have the inefficacy of this expedient: "Yet

shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." In the 32d verse, he gives the reason of this inefficacy: "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment." And in the 33d verse, he intimates to us the right expedient, under the form of complaining that he himself has not the benefit of it: "Neither is there any day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both."

I. It is not be wondered at, that even a mistaken efficacy should be ascribed to snow water, in the country of Job's residence, where snow, if ever it fell at all, must have fallen rarely, at very extraordinary seasons, and in the more elevated parts of his neighbourhood. This rarity, added to its unsullied whiteness, might have given currency to an idea of its efficacy as a purifier, beyond what actually belonged to it. Certain it is, too, that snow water, like water deposited from the atmosphere in any other form, does not possess that hardness which is often to be met with in spring water. But however this be, and whether the popular notion of the purifying virtues of snow water, taken up by Job, be well founded or not, we have here an expedient suggested for making the hands clean, and the

man pure and acceptable in the sight of God,—a method proposed within the reach of man, and which man can perform, for making himself an object of complacency to his Maker,—a method too, which is quite effectual for beautifying all that meets the discernment of the outward eye, and which is here set before us, as connected with the object of gaining the eye of that high and heavenly Witness with whom we have to do. This is what we understand to be represented by washing with snow water. It comprehends all that man can do for washing himself, and for making himself clean in the sight of God. Job complains of the fruitlessness of this expedient, and perhaps mingles with his complaints the reproaches of a spirit that was not yet subdued to entire acquiescence in the righteousness of God. Let us try to examine this matter, and, if possible, ascertain whether man is able, on the utmost stretch of his powers and of his performances, to make himself an object of approbation to his Judge.

Without entering into the metaphysical controversy about the extent or the freedom of human agency, let it be observed, that there is a plain and a popular understanding on the subject of what man can do, and of what he cannot do. We wish to proceed on this under-

standing for the present, and to illustrate it by a few examples. Should it be asked, if a man can keep his hands from stealing, it would be the unhesitating answer of almost every one, that he can do it; and if he can keep his tongue from lying, that he can do it; and if he can constrain his feet to carry him every Sabbath to the house of God, that he can do this also; and if he can tithe his income, or even reducing himself to the necessaries of life, make over the mighty sacrifice of all the remainder to the poor, that it is certainly possible for him to do it; and if he can keep a guard upon his lips, so that not one whisper of malignity shall escape from them, that he can also prescribe this task to himself, and is able to perform it; and if he can read much of his Bible, and utter many prayers in private, that he can do it; and if he can assemble his family on the morning and the evening of every day, and go through the worship of God along with them, that all this he can do,—that all this lies within the compass of human agency.

Let any one man do, then, what all men think it possible for him to do, and he will wear upon his person the visible exhibition of much to recommend him to the favourable judgment of his fellows. He will be guilty of no one transgression against the peace and order of society.

He will be correct, and regular, and completely inoffensive. He will contribute many a deed of positive beneficence to the welfare of those around him; and may even, on the strength of his many decencies, and many observations, hold out an aspect of religiousness to the general eye of the world. There will be a wide and most palpable distinction of character between him, and those who, at large from the principle of self-control, resign themselves to the impulse of every present temptation; and are either intemperate, or dishonest, or negligent of ordinances, just as habit, or the urgency of their feelings and their circumstances, may happen to have obtained the ascendancy over them. These do not what they might, and what, in common estimation, they can do; and it is just because the man has put forth all his strenuousness to the task of accomplishing all that he is able for, that he looks so much more seemly than those who are beside him, and holds out a far more engaging display of what is moral and praise-worthy to all his acquaintances.

II. I will not be able to convince you how superficial the reformation of all these doings is, without passing on to the 31st verse, and proving, that, in the pure eye of God, the man who has made the most copious application in

his power of snow water to the visible conduct, may still be an object of abhorrence; and that if God enter into judgment with him, he will make him appear as one plunged in the ditch, his righteousness as filthy rags, and himself as an unclean thing. There are a thousand things which, in popular and understood language, man can do. It is quite the general sentiment, that he can abstain from stealing, and lying, and calumny,—that he can give of his substance to the poor, and attend church, and pray, and read his Bible, and keep up the worship of God in his family. But, as an instance of distinction between what we can do, and what he cannot do, let us make the undoubted assertion that he can eat wormwood, and just put the question, if he can also relish wormwood. That is a different affair. I may command the performance; but have no such command over my organs of sense, as to command a liking, or a taste for the performance. The illustration is homely; but it is enough for our purpose, if it be effective. I may accomplish the doing of what God bids; but have no pleasure in God himself. The forcible constraining of the hand may make out many a visible act of obedience, but the relish of the heart may refuse to go along with it. The outer man may be all in a bustle about the

commandments of God, while to the inner man God is an offence and a weariness. His neighbours may look at him, and all that their eye can reach may be as clean as snow water can make it. But the eye of God reaches a great deal farther. He is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and he may see the foulness of spiritual idolatry in every one of its receptacles. The poor man has no more conquered his rebellious affections, than he has conquered his distaste for wormwood. He may fear God; he may listen to God; and, in outward deed, may obey God. But he does not, and he will not, love God; and while he drags a heavy load of tasks, and duties, and observances after him, he lives in the hourly violation of the first and greatest of the commandments.

Would any parent among you, count it enough that you obtained a service like this from one of your children? Would you be satisfied with the obedience of his hand, while you knew that the affections of his heart were totally away from you? Let every one requirement, issued from the chair of parental authority, be most rigidly and punctually done by him, would not the sullenness of his alienated countenance turn the whole of it into bitterness? It is the heart of his son which the par-

ent longs after; and the lurking distaste and disaffection which rankle there, can never, never be made up by such an obedience, as the yoked and the tortured negro is compelled to yield to the whip of the overseer. The service may be done; but all that can minister satisfaction in the principle of the service, may be withheld from it; and though the very last item of the bidden performance is rendered, this will neither mend the deformity of the unnatural child, nor soothe the feelings of the afflicted and the mortified father.

God is the Father of spirits; and the willing subjection of the spirit is that which he requires of us. "My son, give me thy heart;" and if the heart be withheld, God says of all our visible performances, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" The heart is his requirement; and full indeed is the title which he prefers to it. He put life into us; and it is he who hath drawn a circle of enjoyments, and friendships, and interests, around us. Every thing that we take delight in, is ministered to us out of his hand. He plies us every moment with his kindness; and when at length the gift stole the heart of man away from the Giver, so that he became a lover of his own pleasure, rather than a lover of God, even then would he not leave us to perish in the guilt of

our rebellion. Man made himself an alien, but God was not willing to abandon him; and, rather than lose him for ever, did he devise a way of access by which to woo, and to welcome him back again. The way of our recovery is indeed a way that his heart was set upon; and to prove it, he sent his own eternal Son into the world, who unrobed him of all his glories, and made himself of no reputation. He had to travel in the greatness of his strength, that he might unbar the gates of acceptance to a guilty world; and now that, in full harmony with the truth and the justice of God, sinners may draw nigh through the blood of the atonement, what is the wonderful length to which the condescension of God carries him? Why, he actually beseeches us to be reconciled; and, with a tone more tender than the affection of an earthly father ever prompted, does he call upon us to turn, and to turn, for why should we die? If, after all this, the antipathy of nature to God still cleave to us,—if, under the power of this antipathy, the service we yield be the cold and unwilling service of constraint,—if, with many of the visible outworks of obedience, there be also the strugglings of a reluctant heart to take away from this obedience all its cheerfulness, is not God defrauded of his offering? Does there not rest on the moral aspect of our character, in

reference to him, all the odiousness of unnatural children? Let our outer doings be what they may, does there not adhere to us the turpitude of having deeply revolted against that Being whose kindness has never abandoned us? And, though pure in the eye of our fellows, and our hands be clean as with snow water, is there nothing in our hearts against which a spiritual law may denounce its severities, and the Giver of that law may lift a voice of righteous expostulation? "Hear ye now what the Lord saith: Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me."

It is not easy to lay open the utter nakedness of the natural heart in reference to God; or to convince the possessor of it, that, under the guise of his many plausibilities, there may lurk that which gives to sin all its hideousness. The mere man of ordinances cannot acquiesce in what he reckons to be the exaggerations of orthodoxy upon this subject; nor can he at all conceive how it is possible that, with so much of the semblance of godliness about him, there

should, at the same time, be within him the very opposite of godliness. It is, indeed, a difficult task to carry upon this point the conviction of him who positively loves the Sabbath, and to whom the chime of its morning bells brings the delightful associations of peace and of sacredness,—who has his hours of prayer, at which he gathers his family around him, and his hours of attendance on that house where the man of God deals out his weekly lessons to the assembled congregation. It may be in vain to tell him, that God in fact is a weariness to his heart, when it is attested to him by his own consciousness,—that, when the preacher is before him, and the people are around him, and the professed object of their coming together is to join in the exercise of devotion, and to grow in the knowledge of God, he finds in fact that all is pleasantness,—that his eye is not merely filled with the public exhibition, and his ear regaled by the impressiveness of a human voice, but that the interest of his heart is completely kept up by the succession and variety of the exercises. It may be in vain to tell him, that this religion of taste, or this religion of habit, or this religion of inheritance, may utterly consist with the deep and the determined worldliness of all his affections,—that he whom he thinks to be the God of his Sabbath is not the God of his

week; but that, throughout all the successive days of it, he is going astray after the idols of vanity, and living without God in the world. This is demonstration enough of all his forms, and all his observations, being a mere surface display, without a living principle of piety. But perhaps it may serve more effectually to convince him of it, should we ask him, how his godliness thrives in the closet, and what are the workings of his heart, in the abstract and solitary hour of intercourse, with the unseen Father. In church, there may be much to interest him, and to keep him alive. But when alone, and deserted by all the accompaniments of a solemn assembly, we should like to know with what vivacity he enters on the one business of meditating on God, and holding converse with God. Is the sense of the all-seeing and ever-present Deity enough for him; and does love to God brighten and sustain the moments of solitary prayer? The mind may have enough to interest it in church; but does the secret exercise of fellowship with the Father bring no distaste, and no weariness along with it? Is it any thing more than the homage of a formal presentation? And when the business of devotion is thus unpeopled of all its externals, and of all its accessories; when thus reduced to a naked exercise of spirit, can you appeal to the longings, and

the affections of that spirit, as the essential proof of your godliness? And do you never, on occasions like this, discover that which is in your hearts, and detect their enmity to him who formed them? Do you afford no ground for the complaint which he uttered of old, when he said, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, and a land of darkness?" And do you not perceive that with this direction of your feelings and your desires away from the living God, though you be outwardly clean, as by the operation of snow water, he may plunge you in the ditch, and make your own clothes to abhor you?

We shall conclude this part of our subject with two observations.

First, The efforts of nature may, in point of inadequacy, be compared to the application of snow water. Yet there is a practical mischief here, in which the zeal of controversy, bent on its one point, and its one principle, may unconsciously involve us. We are not, in pursuit of any argument whatever, to lose sight of efforts. We are not to deny them the place, and the importance which the Bible plainly assigns to them; nor are we to forbear insisting upon their performance by men, previous to conversion, and in the very act of conversion, and in every period of the progress, however far advanced it

may be, of the new creature in Jesus Christ our Lord. We speak just now of men, previous to conversion, and we call to your remembrance the example of John the Baptist. The injudicious way in which the doings of men have been spoken of, has had practically this effect on many an inquirer. Since doing is of so little consequence, let us even abstain from it. Now the forerunner of Christ spake a very different language. He unceasingly called upon the people to do;—and this was the very preaching which the divine wisdom appointed, as a preparation for the Saviour. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."—"Exact no more than that which is appointed."—"Do violence to no man; neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." Was not John, then, it may be said, a mere superficial reformer? Had he stopped short at this, he would have been no better. His teaching could have done no more than is done by the mere application of snow water. But he did not stop here. He told the people that there was a preacher, and a preaching to come after him, in comparison of which he and his sermons were nothing. He pointed the eye and the expectation of his hearers full upon one that was greater than himself; and, while he bap-

tized with water unto repentance, and called upon the people to frame their doings, he told them of one mightier than he, who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

And, Secondly, That you may be convinced of the utter necessity of such a baptism, let us affirm the inadequacy of all the fairest virtues and accomplishments of nature. God has, for the well-being of society, provided man with certain feelings and constitutional principles of action, which lead him to a conduct beneficial to those around him; to which conduct he may be carried by the impulse of these principles, with as little reference to the will of God, as a mother, among the inferior animals, when constrained by the sweet and powerful influences of natural affection, to guard the safety, and provide for the nourishment of her young. Take account of these principles as they exist in the bosom of man—and you there find compassion for the unfortunate; the shame of detection in any thing mean, or disgraceful; the desire of standing well in the opinion of his fellows; the kindlier charities, which shed a mild and a quiet lustre over the walks of domestic life; and those wider principles of patriotism and public usefulness which, combined with an appetite for distinction, will raise a few of the more illustrious of our race to some high and splendid

career of beneficence. Now these are the principles which, scattered in various proportions among the individuals of human kind, give rise to the varied hues of character among them. Some possess them in no sensible degree; and they are pointed at with abhorrence, as the most monstrous and deformed of the species. Others have an average share of them; and they take their station amongst the common-place characters of society. And others go beyond the average; and are singled out from amongst their fellows, as the kind, the amiable, the sweet-tempered, the upright, whose hearts swell with honourable feeling, or whose pulse beats high in the pride of integrity.

Now, conceive for a moment, that the belief of a God were to be altogether expunged from the world. We have no doubt that society would suffer most painfully in its temporal interests by such an event. But the machine of society might still be kept up; and on the face of it you might still meet with the same gradations of character, and the same varied distribution of praise, among the individuals who compose it. Suppose it possible, that the world could be broken off from the system of God's administration altogether; and that he were to consign it, with all its present accommodations, and all its natural principles, to some far and

solitary place beyond the limits of his economy —we should still find ourselves in the midst of a moral variety of character; and man, sitting in judgment over it, would say of some, that they are good, and of others, that they are evil. Even in this desolate region of atheism, the eye of the sentimentalist might expatiate among beauteous and interesting spectacles,—amiable mothers shedding their graceful tears over the tomb of departed infancy; high-toned integrity maintaining itself unsullied amid the allurements of corruption; benevolence plying its labours of usefulness; and patriotism earning its proud reward, in the testimony of an approving people. Here, then, you have compassion, and natural affection, and justice, and public spirit—but would it not be a glaring perversion of language to say, that there was godliness in a world, where there was no feeling and no conviction about God?

In the midst of this busy scene, let God reveal himself, not to eradicate these principles of action—but giving his sanction to whatsoever things are just, and lovely, and honourable, and of good report, to make himself known, at the same time as the Creator, and Upholder of all things, and as the Being with whom all his rational offspring had to do. Is this solemn announcement from the voice of the Eternal to

make no difference upon them? Are those principles which might flourish and be sustained on a soil of atheism, to be counted enough even after the wonderful truth of a living and a reigning God has burst upon the world? You are just;—right, indispensably right. You say you have asserted no more than your own. But this property is not your own. He gave it to you, and he may call upon you to give to him an account of your stewardship. You are compassionate;—right also. But what if he set up the measure of the sanctuary upon your compassion? and, instead of a desultory instinct, excited to feeling by a moving picture of sensibility, and limited in effect to a humble fraction of your expenditure, he call upon you to love your neighbour as yourself, and to maintain this principle at the expense of self-denial, and in the midst of manifold provocations? You love your children;—still indispensably right. But what if he should say, and he has actually said it, that you may know how to give good gifts unto your children, and still be evil? and that if you love father or mother, or wife or children, more than him, you are not worthy of him? The lustre of your accomplishments dazzles the eye of your neighbourhood, and you bask with a delighted heart in the sunshine of glory. But what if he should say, that his

glory, and not your own, should be the constant aim of your doings? and that if you love the praise of men more than the praise of God, you stand in the pure and spiritual records of heaven, convicted of idolatry? You love the things of the world; and the men of the world, coming together in judgment upon you, take no offence at it. But God takes offence at it. He says,—and is he not right in saying?—that if the gift withdraw the affections from the Giver, there is something wrong; that the love of these things is opposite to the love of the Father; and that, unless you withdraw your affections from a world that perisheth, you will perish along with it. Surely if these, and such like principles, may consist with the atheism of a world where God is unthought of, and unknown,—you stand convicted of a still deeper and more determined atheism, who, under the revelation of a God challenging the honour that is due unto his name, are satisfied with your holding in society, and live without him in the world.

SERMON V.

THE JUDGMENT OF MEN, COMPARED WITH THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

1 Corinthians iv. 3, 4.

"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment;—he that judgeth me is the Lord."

III. When two parties meet together on the business of adjusting their respective claims, or when, in the language of our text, they come together in judgment, the principles on which they proceed must depend on the relation in which they stand to each other;—and we know not a more fatal, or a more deep-laid delusion, than that by which the principles, applicable to the case of a man entering into judgment with his fellow-men, are transferred to the far different case of man's entering into judgment with his God. Job seems to have been aware of this

difference, and at times to have been humbled by it. In reference to man, he stood on triumphant ground, and often spoke of it in a style of boastful vindication. No one could impeach his justice. No one could question his generosity. And he made his confident appeal to the remembrance of those around him, when he says of himself, that he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him; that the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy; that he put on righteousness, and it clothed him, and his judgment was as a robe and a diadem; that he was eyes to the blind, and feet was he to the lame; that he was a father to the poor, and the cause that he knew not, he searched out. On these grounds did he challenge the judgment of man, and actually obtained it. For we are told, because he did all this, that when the ear heard him, then it blessed him, and when the eye saw him, it gave witness unto him.

There is not a more frequent exercise of mind in society, than that by which the members of it form and declare their judgment of each other,—and the work of thus deciding is a work which they all share in, and on which, perhaps, there is not a day of their lives wherein they are not called upon to expend some mea-

sure of attention and understanding,—and we know not if there be a single topic that more readily engages the conversation of human beings,—and often do we utter our own testimony, and hear the testimony of others to the virtues and vices of the absent,—and out of all this has arisen a standard of estimation,—and it is such a standard as many may actually reach, and some have actually exceeded,—and thus it is, that it appears to require a very extended scale of reputation to take in all the varieties of human character,—and while the lower extremity of it is occupied by the dishonest, and the perfidious, and the glaringly selfish, who are outcasts from general respect; on the higher extremity of it, do we behold men, to whom are awarded, by the universal voice, all the honours of a proud and unsullied excellence; and their walk in the world is dignified by the reverence of many salutations—and as we hear of their truth and their uprightness, and their princely liberalities, and of a heart alive to every impulse of sympathy, and of a manner sweetened by all the delicacies of genuine kindness;—who does not see that, in this assemblage of moral graces and accomplishments, there is enough to satisfy man, and to carry the admiration of man? and can we wonder if, while we gaze on so fine a specimen of our nature, we should not merely

pronounce upon him an honourable sentence at the tribunal of human judgment, but we should conceive of him, that he looks as bright and faultless in the eye of God, and that he is in every way meet for his presence and his friendship in eternity?

Now, if there be any truth in the distinction of our text; if a man may have the judgment of his fellows, and yet be utterly unfit for contending in judgment with God; if there be any emphasis in the consideration, that he is God, and not man; or any delusion in conceiving of him, that he is altogether like unto ourselves,—may not all that ready circulation of praise, and of acknowledgment, which obtains in society, carry a most ruinous, and a most bewitching influence along with it? Is it not possible, that on the applause of man there may be reared a most treacherous self-complacency? Might not we build a confidence before God, on this sandy foundation? Think you not, that it is just this ill-supported confidence which shuts out from many a heart the humiliating doctrine of the gospel? Is there no such imagination, as, that because we are so well able to stand our ground before the judgment of the world, we shall be equally well able to stand our ground before the judgment-seat of the great day? Are there not many who, upon this very principle, count

themselves rich and to have need of nothing? And have you never met with men of character and estimation in society, who, surrounded by the gratulations of their neighbourhood, find the debasing views of humanity, which are set before us in the New Testament, to be beyond their comprehension; who are utterly in the dark, as to the truth and the justness of such representations, and with whom the voice of God is therefore deafened by the voice and the testimony of men? They see not themselves in that character of vileness and of guilt which he ascribes to them. They are blind to the principle of the text, that he is not a man; and that they may not be able to answer him, though they may be able to meet the every reproach, and to hold out the lofty vindication against every charge, which any one of their fellows may prefer. And thus it is, that many live in the habitual neglect of a salvation which they cannot see that they require; and spend their days in an insidious security, from which nothing but the voice of the last messenger, or the call of the last trumpet, shall awaken them.

To do away this delusion, we shall advert to two leading points of distinction between the judgment of men, and that of God. There is a distinction founded upon the claims which God has a right to prefer against us, when compared

with the claims which our fellow-men have a right to prefer against us;—and there is a distinction founded upon that clearer and more elevated sense which God has of that holiness, without which, no man shall see his face, of that moral worth, without which, we are utterly unfit for the society of heaven.

The people around me have no right to complain, if I give to every man his own; or, in other words, if I am true to all my promises, and faithful to all my bargains; and if what I claim as justice to myself, I most scrupulously render to others, when they are in like circumstances with myself. Now, let me do all this, and I earn amongst my fellows, the character of a man of honour and of equity. Did I live with such a character in an unfallen world, these virtues would not at all signalize me, though the opposite vices would mark me out for universal surprise and indignation. But it so happens, that I live in a world full of corruption, where deceit and dishonesty are common;—where, though the higher degrees of them are spoken of with abhorrence, the lower degrees of them are looked at with a very general connivance;—where the inflexibility of a truth that knows not one art of concealment, and the delicacy of an honour that was never tainted, would greatly signalize me;—and thus it is,

that though I went not beyond the strict requirements of integrity, yet, by my nice and unvarying fulfilment of them, should I rise above the ordinary level of human reputation, and be rewarded by the most flattering distinctions of human applause.

But again, I may, in fact, give to others more than their own; and in so doing, I may earn the credit of other virtues. I may gather an additional lustre around my character, and collect from those around me, the tribute of a still louder and more rapturous approbation. I may have a heart constitutionally framed to the feeling and the exercise of compassion. I may scatter on every side of me, the treasures of beneficence. I may have an eye for pity, and a hand open as day for melting charity. I may lay aside a large proportion of my wealth to the service of others,—and what with a bosom open to every impulse of pity, and with an eye ever lighted up by the smile of courteousness, and with a ready ear to all that is offered in the shape of complaint or supplication, I may not go beyond the demands of others, but I may go greatly beyond all that they have a right to demand,—and if I signalized myself by rendering faithfully to every man his due,—still more shall I signalize myself by a kindness that is never weary, by a liberality that never is exhausted.

Now, we need not offer to assign the precise degree to which a man must carry the exercise of these gratuitous virtues, ere he can obtain for them the good will, and the good opinion of society. We need not say, by how small a fraction of his income, he may thus purchase the homage of his acquaintances,—at how easy a rate he may send away one person delighted by his affability; or another by the hospitality of his reception; or a third by the rendering of a personal service; or a fourth by the direct conveyance of a present,—or, finally, for what expense he may surround himself by the gratitude of many poor, and the blessings and the prayers of many cottages. We cannot bring forward any rigid computation of this matter. But we appeal to the experience of your own history, and to your observation of others, if a man might not, without any painful, or any sensible surrender of enjoyment at all, stand out to the eye of others in a blaze of moral reputation—if the substantial citizen might not, on the convivialities of friendship, be indulging his own taste, and, at the very time, be securing from his pleased and satisfied guests, the attestations of their cordiality—if the man of business might not be nobly generous to his friends in adversity, and, at the same time, be running one unvaried career of accumulation—if the

man of society might not be charming every acquaintance, by the truth and the tenderness of his expressions, and, at the same time, instead of impairing, be heightening his share of that felicity, which the Author of our being has annexed to human intercourse—if a thousand little acts of accommodation, from one neighbour to another, might not swell the tide of praise and of popularity, and yet, as ample a remainder of pleasurable feeling be left to each as before.—And even when the sacrifice is more painful, and the generosity more romantic, and man can appeal to some mighty reduction of wealth, as the measure of his beneficence to others, might it not be said of him, if the life be more than meat, and the body than raiment, that still there is left to him more than he can possibly surrender?—that, though he strip himself of all his goods to feed the poor, there remains to him that, without which, all is nothingness,—that, a breathing and a conscious man, he still treads on the face of our world, and bears his part in that universe of life, where the unfailing compassion of God still continues to uphold him,—that, instead of lying wrapt in the insensibility of an eternal grave, he has all the images of a waking existence around him, and all the glories of immortality before him,—that, instead of being withered to a thing of

nought, and gone to that dark and hidden land, where all is silence and deep annihilation, a thousand avenues of enjoyment are still open to him, and the promise of a daily provision is still made sure, and he is free to all the common blessings of nature, and he is freer still to all the consolations, and to all the privileges of the gospel.

Thus it appears, that after I have fulfilled all the claims of men, and men are satisfied,—that after having gone, in the exercise of liberality, beyond these claims, and men are filled with delight and admiration,—that after, on the footing of equal and independent rights, I have come into judgment with my fellows, and they have awarded to me the tribute of their most honourable testimony, the footing on which I stand with God still remains to be attended to, —and his claims still remain to be adjusted,— and the mighty account still lies uncancelled between the creature and the Creator,—between the man who, in reference to his neighbours, can say, I give every one his own, and out of my own, I expatiate in acts of tenderness and generosity amongst them, and the God who can say, You have nothing that you did not receive, and all you ever gave, is out of the ability which I have conferred upon you, and this wealth is not your own, but his who

bestowed it, and who now calls upon you to render an account of your stewardship,—between the man, who has purchased, by a fraction of his property, the good-will of his acquaintances, and the God who asserts his right to have every fraction of it turned into an expression of gratitude, and devoted to his glory, —between the man who holds up his head in society, because his justice, and the ministrations of his liberality, have distinguished him, and the God who demands the returns of duty and of acknowledgment, for giving him the fund of these ministrations, and for giving what no money can purchase,—for putting the principle of life into his bosom,—for furnishing him with all his senses, and, through these inlets of communication, giving him a part, and a property, in all that is around him,—for sustaining him in all the elements of his being, and conferring upon him all his capacities, and all his joys.

Now, what we wish you to feel is, that the judgment of men may be upon your side, and the judgment of God be most righteously against you,—that, while from the one nothing is heard but admiration and gratitude, from the other, there may be such a charge of sinfulness, as, when set in order before your eye, will convince you, that he by whom you consist, is de-

frauded of all his offerings,—that, while all the common honesties and humanities of social life, are acquitted to the entire satisfaction of others, and to the entire purity of your own reputation in the world, your whole heart and conduct may be utterly pervaded by the habit of ungodliness,—that, while not one claim which your neighbours can prefer, is not met most readily, and discharged most honourably, the great claims of the Creator, over those whom he has formed, may lie altogether unheeded; and he, your constant benefactor, be not loved, —and he, your constant preserver, be not depended on,—and he, your most legitimate Sovereign, be not obeyed,—and he, the unseen Spirit, who pervades all, and upholds all, be neither worshipped in spirit and in truth, nor vested with the hold of a rightful supremacy over your rebellious affections.

God is not man, nor can we measure what is due to him, by what is due to our fellows in society. He made us, and he upholds us, and at his will the life which is in us, will, like the expiring vapour, pass away; and the tabernacle of the body, that curious frame-work which man thinks he can move at his own pleasure, when it is only in God that he moves, as well as lives, and has his being, will, when abandoned by its spirit, mix with the dust out of

which it was formed, and enter again into the unconscious glebe from which it was taken. It was indeed a wondrous preferment, for unshapen clay to be wrought into so fine an organic structure, but not more wondrous, surely, than that the soul which animates it, should have been created out of nothing; and what shall we say, if the compound being so originated, and so sustained, and depending on the will of another for every moment of his continuance, is found to spurn the thought of God, in distaste and disaffection away from him? When the Spirit returns to him who sitteth on the throne,—when the question is put, Amid all the multitude of your doings in the world, what have you done unto me?—when the rightful ascendency of his claims over every movement of the creature, is made manifest by him who judgeth righteously,—when the high but just pretensions of all things being done to his glory,—of the entire heart being consecrated, in every one of its regards, to his person and character,—of the whole man being set apart to his service, and every compromise being done away, between the world, on the one hand, and that Being, on the other, who is jealous of his honour;—when these high pretensions are set up, and brought into comparison with the character and the conduct of any one of us, and it

be inquired, in how far we have rendered unto God the ever-breathing gratitude that is due to him, and that obedience which we should feel at all times to be our task and our obligation,—how shall we fare in that great day of examination, if it be found, that this has not been the tendency of our nature at all? and when he who is not a man shall thus enter into judgment with us, how shall we be able to stand?

Amid all the praise we give and receive from each other, we may have no claims to that substantial praise which cometh from God only. Men may be satisfied, but it followeth not that God is satisfied. Under a ruinous delusion upon this subject, we may fancy ourselves to be rich, and have need of nothing, while, in fact, we are naked, and destitute, and blind, and miserable. And thus it is, that there is a morality of this world, which stands in direct opposition to the humbling representations of the gospel; which cannot comprehend what it means by the utter worthlessness and depravity of our nature; which passionately repels this statement, and that too on its own consciousness of attainments superior to those of the sordid, and the profligate, and the dishonourable; and is fortified in its resistance to the truth as it is in Jesus, by the flattering testimonials which it gathers to its respectability and its worth, from the various quarters of human society.

A just sense of the extent of claim which God has upon his own creatures, would lay open this hiding-place of security,—would lead us to see, that to do some things for our neighbours, is not the same with doing all things for our Maker,—that a natural principle of honesty to man, is altogether distinct from a principle of entire devotedness to God,—that the tithe which we bestow upon others, is not an equivalent for a total dedication unto God of ourselves, and of all which belongs to us,—that we may present those around us with many an offering of kindness, and not present our bodies a living sacrifice to God, which is our reasonable service,—that we may earn a cheap and easy credit for such virtues as will satisfy the world, and be utter strangers to the self-denial, and the spirituality, and the mortification, of every earthly desire, and the affection for the things that are above;—all of which graces enter as essential ingredients into the sanctification of the gospel.

But this leads us to the second point of distinction between the judgment of man and that of God,—even his clearer and more elevated sense of that holiness, without which no man shall see his face, and of that moral worth, without which we are utterly unfit for the society of heaven.

Man's sense of the right and the wrong may

be clear and intelligent enough, in so far as that part of character is concerned which renders us fit for the society of earth. Those virtues, without which a community could not be held together, are both urgently demanded by that community, and highly appreciated by it. The morality of our earthly-life, is a morality which is in direct subservience to our earthly accommodation; and seeing that equity, and humanity, and civility, are in such visible and immediate connection with all the security, and all the enjoyment which they spread around them, it is not to be wondered at, that they should throw over the character of him by whom they are exhibited, the lustre of a grateful and a superior estimation. And thus it is, that even without any very nice or exquisite refinement of these virtues, many an ordinary character will pass;—and should that character be deformed by the levities, or even by the profligacies of intemperance, he who sustains it may still bear his part among the good men of society,—and keep away from it all that malignity, and all that dishonesty, which have a disturbing effect on the enjoyments of others, and these others will still retain their kindliness for the good-humoured convivialist,—and he will be suffered to retain his own taste, and his own peculiarities;—and, though it may be true, that chastity, and self-

control, and the severer virtues of personal discipline and restraint, would in fact give a far more happy and healthful tone to society than at present it possesses, yet this influence is not so conspicuous, and heedless men do not look so far; and therefore it is, that in spite of his many outward and positive transgressions of the divine law, many an individual can be referred to, who, with his average share of the integrities and the sensibilities of social life, has stamped upon him the currency of a very fair every-day character, who moves among his fellows without disgrace, and meets with acceptance throughout the general run of this world's companies.

If such a measure of indulgence be extended to the very glaring iniquities of the outer man, let us not wonder, though the errors of the heart, the moral diseases of the spirit, the disorganization of the inner man, with its turbulent passions, and its worldly affections, and its utter deadness to the consideration of an overruling God, should find a very general indulgence among our brethren of the species. Bring a man to sit in judgment over the depravities of our common nature, and unless these depravities are obviously pointed against the temporal good of society, what can we expect, but that he will connive at the infirmities of which

he feels himself to be so large and so habitual a partaker? What can we expect, but that his moral sense, clouded as it is against the discernment of his own exceeding turpitude, will also perceive but dimly, and feel but obtusely, a similar turpitude in the character of others? What else can we look for, than that the man who fires so promptly on the reception of an injury, will tolerate in his fellow all the vindictive propensities?—or, that the man who feels not in his bosom a single movement of principle or of tenderness towards God, will tolerate in another an equally entire habit of ungodliness?—or, that the man who surrenders himself to the temptations of voluptuousness, will perceive no enormity of character at all in the unrestrained dissipations of an acquaintance? —And, in a word, when I see a man whose rights I have never invaded, who has no complaint of personal wrong or provocation to allege against me, and who shares equally with myself in nature's blindness, and nature's propensities, I will not be afraid of entering into judgment with him; nor shall I stand in awe of any penetrating glance from his eye, of any indignant remonstrance from his offended sense of what is righteous, though there be made bare to his inspection all my devotedness to the world, and all my proud disdain at the insolence

of others, and all my anger at the sufferings of injustice, and all my indifference to the God who formed me, and all those secrecies of an unholy and unheavenly character, which are to be brought out into full manifestation on the great day of the winding up of this world's history.

It is a very capital delusion that God is like unto man—" Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set thy sins in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Man and man may come together in judgment, and retire from each other in mutual complacency. But when man and God thus come together, there is another principle, and another standard of examination. There is a claim of justice on the part of the Creator, totally distinct from any claim which a fellow creature can prefer,—and while the one will tolerate all that is consistent with the economy and the interest of the society upon earth, the other can tolerate nothing that is inconsistent with the economy and the character of the society in heaven. God made us for eternity. He designed us to be the members of a family which never separates, and over which he him-

self presides in the visible glory of all that worth, and of all that moral excellence, which belong to him. He formed us at first after his own likeness; and ere we can be re-admitted into that paradise from which we have been exiled, we must be created anew in the image of God. These spirits must be made perfect, and every taint of selfishness and impurity be done away from them. Heaven is the place into which nothing that is unclean or unholy can enter; and we are not preparing for our inheritance there, unless there be gathering upon us here, the lineaments of a celestial character. Now, a man may be accomplished in the moralities of civil and of social life, without so much as the semblance of such a character resting upon him. He may have no share whatsoever in the tastes, or in the enjoyments, or in the affections of paradise. There might not be a single trace of the mark of the Lamb of God upon his forehead. He who ponders so intelligently the secrets of the heart, may be able to discover there no vestige of any love for himself, no sensibility at all to what is amiable, or to what is great, in the character of the Godhead,—no desire whatever after his glory,—no such feeling towards him who is to tabernacle with men, as will qualify him to bear a joyful part in the songs and the praises of that city which has foundations. Surrounded

as he is by the perishable admiration of his fellows, he is altogether out of affection, and out of acquaintance, with that Being with whom he has to do; and it will be found, on the great day of the doings, and the deliberations of the judgment-seat, that as he had no relish for God in time, so is he utterly unfit for his presence, or for his friendship in eternity.

It is said of God, that he created man after his own image, and it was upon losing this image that he was cast out of paradise, and ere he can be again admitted, the image that has been lost must again be formed on him. The grand qualification for the society of heaven, is, that each of its members be like unto God. In the selfish and sensual society of earth, there is many a feature of resemblance to the Godhead that is most readily dispensed with; and many an individual here obtains applause and toleration among his fellows, though there is not one attribute of the saintly character belonging to him. Let him only fulfil the stipulations of integrity, and smile benignity upon his friends, and render the alacrity of willing and valuable services to those who have never offended him, and on the strength of such performances as these may he rise to a conspicuous place in the scale of this world's reputation. But what would have been the sad event to us, had these

been the only performances which went to illustrate the character of the Godhead;—had he been a God of whom we could say no more, than that he possessed the one attribute of an unrelenting justice, or even that he went beyond this attribute, in the exercise of kindness to those who loved him, and in acts of beneficence to those who had never offended him? Do we not owe our place and our prospect to the love of God for his enemies? Is it not from the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering, that we draw all our enjoyments in time, and all our hopes for eternity? Is it not because, though grieved with sinners every day, he still waits to be gracious; that he holds out to us, his heedless and wayward children, the beseeching voice of reconciliation; and puts on such an aspect of tenderness to those who have not ceased from their birth to vex his Holy Spirit, and to thwart him every hour by the perverseness of their disobedience? This is the godlike attribute on which all the privileges of our fallen race are suspended; and yet against the imitation of which, nature, when urged by the provocations of injustice, rises in such a tumult of strong and impetuous resistance. It is through the putting forth of this attribute, that any redeemed sinners are to be found among the other society of heaven; but into

which no member shall be admitted out of this corrupt world, till there be stamped and realized on his own person, that feature of the divinity to which he owes a distinction so exalted. And tell us, ye men who are so jealous of right and of honour, who take sudden fire at every insult, and suffer the slightest imagination of another's contempt, or another's unfairness, to chase from your bosom every feeling of complacency;—ye men whom every fancied affront puts into such a turbulence of emotion, and in whom every fancied infringement stirs up the quick and the resentful appetite for justice—how will you stand the rigorous application of that test by which the forgiven of God are ascertained, even that the spirit of forgiveness is in them, and by which it will be pronounced whether you are indeed the children of the highest, and perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect?

But we must hasten to a close, and will, therefore, barely suggest some other matters of self-examination. We ask you, to think of the facility with which you might obtain the approbation of men, without being at all like unto God, in the holiness of his character. We ask you to think of the delight which he takes in the contemplation of what is pure, and moral, and righteous. We ask you to think how one great object of his creation, was to diffuse over

the face of it a multiplied resemblance of himself,—and that, therefore, however fit you may be for sustaining your part in the alienated community of this world, you are most assuredly unfit for the great and the general assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, —if, unlike unto God who is in the midst of them, you have no congenial delight with the Father of all, in the contemplation of spiritual excellence. Now, are you not blind to the glories and the perfections of that Being who realizes this excellence to a degree that is infinite? Does not the creature fill up all your avenues of enjoyment, while the Creator is forgotten? In reference to God, is there not an utter dulness and insensibility of all your regards to him? If thus blind to the perception of that supreme virtue and loveliness which reside in the Godhead, are you not; in fact, and by nature an outcast from the Godhead? And an outcast will you ever remain, until your character be brought under some mighty revolutionizing influence, which is able to shift the currency of your desires, and to over-rule nature with all her obstinate habits, and all her fond and favourite predilections.

These are topics of great weight and great pregnancy; but we leave them to your own thoughts, and only ask you at present to look

at the vivid illustration of them that may be gathered out of the history of Job. In reference to his fellows, he could make a triumphant appeal to the honour and the humanity which adorned him,—he could speak of the splendid career of beneficence that he had run,—and, in the recollection of the plaudits that had surrounded him, he could boldly challenge the inspection of all his neighbours, and of all his enemies, on the whole tract of his visible history in the world. He protested his innocence before them, and even so long as he had only heard of God by the hearing of the ear, did he address him in the language of justification. But when God at length revealed himself,—when the worth and the majesty of the Eternal stood before him in visible array,—when the actual presence of his Maker brought the claims of his Maker to bear impressively upon his conscience, it was not merely the presence of the power of God which overawed him, it was the presence of the righteousness of God which convinced him,—and when, from the bright assemblage of all that was pure, and holy, and graceful in the aspect of the Divinity, he turned the eye of contemplation downward upon himself,—O, it is instructive to be told, how the vaunting patriarch shrunk into all the depths of self-abasement at so striking a mani-

festation; and how he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and in ashes."

It is indeed a small matter to be judged of man's judgment. He who judges us is God. From this judgment there is no escape, and no hiding-place. The testimony of our fellows will as little avail us in the day of judgment, as the help of our fellows will avail us in the hour of death. We may as well think of seeking a refuge in the applause of men, from the condemnation of God, as we may think of seeking a refuge in the power or the skill of men, from the mandate of God, that our breath shall depart from us. And, have you never thought, when called to the chamber of the dying man, —when you saw the warning of death upon his countenance, and how its symptoms gathered and grew, and got the ascendency over all the ministrations of human care and of human tenderness,—when it every day became more visible, that the patient was drawing to his close, and that nothing in the whole compass of art or any of its resources, could stay the advances of the sure and the last malady,—have you never thought, on seeing the bed of the sufferer surrounded by other comforters than those of the Patriarch,—when, from morning to night,

and from night to morning, the watchful family sat at his couch, and guarded his broken slumbers, and interpreted all his signals, and tried to hide from his observation the tears which attested him to be the kindest of parents,—when the sad anticipation spread its gloomy stillness over the household, and even sent forth an air of seriousness and concern upon the men of other families,—when you have witnessed the despair of friends, who could only turn them to cry at the spectacle of his last agonies, and had seen how little it was that weeping children and inquiring neighbours could do for him,—when you have contrasted the unrelenting necessity of the grave, with the feebleness of every surrounding endeavour to ward it, has the thought never entered within you—How powerless is the desire of man!—how sure and how resistless is the decree of God!

And on the day of the second death, will it be found, that it is not the imagination of man, but the sentence of God that shall stand. When the sound of the last trumpet awakens us from the grave, and the ensigns of the last day are seen on the canopy of heaven, and the tremor of the dissolving elements is felt upon earth, and the Son of God with his mighty angels are placed around the judgment-seat, and the men of all ages and of all nations are stand-

ing before it, and waiting the high decree of eternity,—then will it be found, that as no power of man can save his fellow from going down to the grave of mortality, so no testimony of man can save his fellow from going down to the pit of condemnation. Each on that day will mourn apart. Each of those on the left hand, engrossed by his own separate contemplation, and overwhelmed by the dark and the lowering futurity of his own existence, will not have a thought or a sympathy to spare for those who are around him. Each of those on the right hand will see and acquiesce in the righteousness of God, and be made to acknowledge, that those things which are highly esteemed among men are in his sight an abomination. When the Judge and his attendants shall come on the high errand of this world's destinies, they will come from God,—and the pure principle they shall bring along with them from the sanctuary of heaven, will be the entire subordination of the thing formed to him who formed it. In that praise which upon earthly feelings the creatures offer one to another, we behold no recognition of this principle whatever; and therefore it is, that it is so very different from the praise which cometh from God only. And should any one of these creatures be made on that great day of manifestation, to see his naked-

ness,—should the question, What have you done unto me? leave him speechless,—should at length, convicted of his utter rebelliousness against God, he try to find among the companions of his pilgrimage, some attestation to the kindliness that beamed from him upon his fellow mortals in the world,—they will not be able to hide him from the coming wrath. In the face of all the tenderness they ever bore him, the severity of an unreconciled Lawgiver must have upon him its resistless operation. They may all bear witness to the honour and the generosity of his doings among men, but there is not one of them who can justify him before God. Nor among all those who now yield him a ready testimony on earth will he find a day's-man betwixt him and his Creator, who can lay his hand upon them both.

SERMON VI.

THE NECESSITY OF A MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

JOB ix. 33.

"Neither is there any day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both."

IV. THE feeling of Job, at the time of his uttering the complaint which is recorded in the verses before us, might not have been altogether free of a reproachful spirit towards those friends who had refused to advocate his cause, and who had even added bitterness to his distress by their most painful and unwelcome arguments. And well may it be our feeling, and that too without the presence of any such ingredient along with it—that there is not a man upon earth who can execute the office of a day's-man betwixt us and God,—that taking the common sense of this term, there is none who can act as

an umpire between us the children of ungodliness, and the Lawgiver whom we have so deeply offended,—or taking up the term that occurs in the Septuagint version of the Bible, that amongst all our brethren of the species, not an individual is to be found who, standing in the place of a mediator, can lay his hand upon us both. It is indeed very possible, that all this may carry the understanding, and at the same time have all the inefficiency of a cold and general speculation. But should the Spirit, whose office it is to convince us of sin, lend the power of his demonstration to the argument,—should he divide asunder our thoughts, and enable us to see that, with the goodly semblance of what is fair and estimable in the sight of man, all within us is defection from the principle of loyalty to God,—that while we yield a duty as the members of society, the duty that lies upon us, as the creatures of the supreme Being, is, in respect of the spirit of allegiance which gives it all its value, fallen away from, by every one of us,—should this conviction cleave to us like an arrow sticking fast, and work its legitimate influence, in causing us to feel all the worthlessness of our characters, and all the need and danger of our circumstances,—then would the urgency of the case be felt as well as understood by us,—nor should we be long of pressing

the inquiry of where is the day's-man betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both?

And, in fact, by putting the Mediator away from you,—by reckoning on a state of safety and acceptance without him, what is the ground upon which, in reference to God, you actually put yourselves? We speak not at present of the danger of persisting in such an attitude of independence,—of its being one of those refuges of treachery, in which the good man of the world is often to be found,—of its being a state wherein peace, when there is no peace, lulls him by its flatteries unto a deceitful repose. We are not at present saying how ruinous it is to rest a security upon an imposing exterior, when, in fact, the heart is not right in the sight of God, and while the reproving eye of Him, who judgeth not as man judgeth, is upon him, or how poisonous is the unction that comes upon the soul, from those praises which, upon the mere exhibition of the social virtues, are rung and circulated through society. But, in addition to the danger, let us insist upon the guilt of thus casting the offered Mediator away from us. It implies, in the most direct possible way, a sentiment of the sufficiency of our own righteousness. It is expressly saying of our obedience, that it is good enough for God. It is presumptuously thinking, that what pleases

the world may please the Maker of it, even though he himself has declared it to be a world lying in wickedness. There is an aggravation you will perceive, in all this which goes beyond the simple infraction of the commandment. It is, after the infraction of it, challenging for some remainder or for some semblance of conformity, the reward and approbation of the God whose law we have dishonoured. It is, after we have braved the attribute of the Almighty's justice, by incurring its condemnation, making an attempt upon the attribute itself, by bringing it down to the standard of a polluted obedience. It is, after insulting the throne of God's righteousness, embarking in the still deadlier enterprise of demolishing all the stabilities which guard it; and spoiling it of that truth which has pronounced a curse on the children of iniquity,—of that holiness which cannot dwell with evil,—of that unchangeableness which will admit of no compromise with sinners that can violate the honours of the Godhead, or weaken the authority of his government over the universe that he has formed. It is laying those paltry accomplishments which give you a place of distinction among your fellows, before that God, of whose throne justice and judgment are the habitation; and calling upon him to connive at all that you want, and

to look with complacency on all that you possess. It is to bring to the bar of judgment the poor and the starving samples of virtue, which are current enough in a world broken loose from its communion with God, and to defy the inspection upon them of God's eternal Son, and of the angels he brings along with him, to witness the righteousness of his decisions. Sin has indeed been the ruin of our nature—but this refusal of the Saviour of sinners, lands them in a perdition still deeper and more irrecoverable. It is blindness to the enormity of sin. It is equivalent to a formally announced sentiment on your part, that your performances, sinful as they are, and polluted as they are, are good enough for heaven. It is just saying of the offered Saviour, that you do not see the use of him. It is a provoking contempt of mercy; and causing the measure of ordinary guilt to overflow, by heaping the additional blasphemy upon it, of calling upon God to honour it by his rewards, and to look to it with the complacency of his approbation.

We cannot, then, we cannot draw near unto God, by a direct or independent approach to him. And who, in these circumstances, is fit to be the day's-man betwixt you? There is not a fellow-mortal from Adam downward, who has not sins of his own to answer for. There is not

one of them who has not the sentence of guilt inscribed upon his own forehead, and who is not arrested by the same unscaled barrier which keeps you at an inaccessible distance from God. There is not one of them whose entrance into the holiest of all, would not inflict on it as great a profanation, as if any of you were to present yourselves before him, who dwelleth there, without a Mediator. There lieth a great gulph between God and the whole of this alienated world: and after looking round amongst all the men of all its generations, we may say, in the language of the text, that there is not a day's-man betwixt us who can lay his hand upon us both.

What we aim at, as the effect of all these observations, is, that you should feel your only security to be in the revealed and the offered Mediator; that you should seek to him as your only effectual hiding-place; and who alone, in the whole range of universal being, is able to lay his hand upon you, and shield you from the justice of the Almighty, and to lay his hand upon God, and stay the fury of the avenger. By him the deep atonement has been rendered. By him the mystery has been accomplished, which angels desired to look into. By him such a sacrifice for sin has been offered, as that, in the acceptance of the sinner, every attribute

of the Divinity is exalted; and the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, though turned into a throne of grace, is still upheld in all its firmness, and in all its glory. Through the unchangeable priest-hood of Christ, the vilest of sinners may draw nigh, and receive of that mercy which has met with truth, and of that peace which is in close alliance with righteousness: and without one perfection of the Godhead being surrendered by this act of forgiveness, all are made to receive a higher and more wondrous manifestation: for though he will by no means clear the guilty, yet there is no place for vengeance, when all their guilt is cleared away by the blood of the everlasting covenant; and though he executeth justice upon the earth, yet he can be just while the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.

The work of our redemption is every where spoken of, as an achievement of strength,—as done by the putting forth of mighty energies,—as the work of one who, travailing in his own unaided greatness, had to tread the wine-press alone; and who, when of the people there was none to help him, did, by his own arm, bring unto him salvation. To move aside the obstacle which beset the path of acceptance,—to reinstate the guilty into favour with the offended and unchangeable Lawgiver,—to avert

from them the execution of that sentence, to which there were staked the truth and justice of the Divinity,—to work out a pardon for the disobedient, and at the same time to uphold, in all their strength, the pillars of that throne which they had insulted,—to intercept the defied penalties of the law, and at the same time, to magnify it, and to make it honourable,—thus to bend, as it were, the holy and everlasting attributes of God, and in doing so, to pour over them the lustre of a high and awful vindication, —this was an enterprise of such height, and depth, and breadth, and length, as no created being could fulfil, and which called forth the might and the counsel of him who is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

When no man could redeem his neighbour from the grave,—God himself found out a ransom. When not one of the beings whom he had formed could offer an adequate expiation, —did the Lord of hosts awaken the sword of vengeance against his fellow. When there was no messenger among the angels who surrounded his throne, that could both proclaim and purchase peace for a guilty world,—did God manifest in the flesh descend in shrouded majesty amongst our earthly tabernacles, and pour out his soul unto the death for us, and purchase the church by his own blood, and bursting away

from the grave which could not hold him, ascend to the throne of his appointed mediatorship; and now he, the first and the last, who was dead and is alive, and maketh intercession for transgressors, is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him; and, standing in the breach between a holy God, and the sinners who have offended him, does he make reconciliation, and lay his hand upon them both.

But it is not enough that the Mediator be appointed by God,—he must be accepted by man. And to incite our acceptance does he hold forth every kind and constraining argument. He casts abroad, over the whole face of the world, one wide and universal assurance of welcome. " Whosoever cometh unto me shall not be cast out." " Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I shall give you rest." " Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded." " Whatsoever ye ask in my name ye shall receive." The path of access to Christ is open and free of every obstacle, which kept fearful and guilty man at an impracticable distance from the jealous and unpacified Lawgiver. He hath put aside the obstacle, and now stands in its place. Let us only go in the way of the gospel, and we shall find nothing between us and God, but

the author and finisher of the gospel,—who, on the one hand, beckons to him the approach of man, with every token of truth and of tenderness; and, on the other hand, advocates our cause with God, and fills his mouth with arguments, and pleads that very atonement which was devised in love by the Father, and with the incense of which he was well pleased, and claims, as the fruit of the travail of his soul, all who put their trust in him; and thus, laying his hand upon God, turns him altogether from the fierceness of his indignation.

But Jesus Christ is something more than the agent of our justification,—he is the agent of our sanctification also. Standing between us and God, he receives from him of that Spirit which is called the promise of the Father, and he pours it forth in free and generous dispensation on those who believe in him. Without this Spirit there may, in a few of the goodlier specimens of our race, be within us the play of what is kindly in constitutional feeling, and without us the exhibition of what is seemly in a constitutional virtue; and man thus standing over us in judgment, may pass his verdict of approbation; and all that is visible in our doings may be pure as by the operation of snow water. But the utter irreligiousness of our nature will remain as entire and as obstinate as ever. The

alienation of our desires from God will persist with unsubdued vigour in our bosoms; and sin, in the very essence of its elementary principle, will still lord it over the inner man with all the power of its original ascendency,—till the deep, and the searching, and the prevailing influence of the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. This is the work of the great Mediator. This is the might and the mystery of that regeneration, without which we shall never see the kingdom of God. This is the office of Him to whom all power is committed, both in heaven and in earth,—who, reigning in heaven, and uniting its mercy with its righteousness; causes them to flow upon earth in one stream of celestial influence; and reigning on earth, and working mightily in the hearts of its people, makes them meet for the society of heaven,—thereby completing the wonderful work of our redemption, by which, on the one hand, he brings the eye of a holy God to look approvingly on the sinner, and, on the other hand, makes the sinner fit for the fellowship, and altogether prepared for the enjoyment of God.

Such are the great elements of a sinner's religion. But if you turn from the prescribed use of them, the wrath of God abideth on you. If you kiss not the Son while he is in the way,

you provoke his anger, and when once it begins to burn, they only are blessed who have put their trust in him. If, on the fancied sufficiency of a righteousness that is without godliness, you neglect the great salvation, you will not escape the severities of that day, when the Being with whom you have to do shall enter with you into judgment; and it is only by fleeing to the Mediator, as you would from a coming storm, that peace is made between you and God, and that, sanctified by the faith which is in Jesus, you are made to abound in such fruits of righteousness, as shall be to praise and glory at the last and the solemn reckoning.

Before we conclude, we shall just advert to another sense, in which the Mediator between God and man may be affirmed to have laid his hand upon them both:—he fills up that mysterious interval which lies between every corporeal being, and the God who is a spirit and is invisible.

No man hath seen God at any time,—and the power which is unseen is terrible. Fancy trembles before its own picture, and superstition throws its darkest imagery over it. The voice of the thunder is awful, but not so awful as the conception of that angry Being who sits in mysterious concealment, and gives it all its energy. In these sketches of the imagination,

fear is sure to predominate. We gather an impression of Nature's God, from those scenes where Nature threatens, and looks dreadful. We speak not of the theology of the schools, and the empty parade of its demonstrations. We speak of the theology of actual feeling,—that theology which is sure to derive its lessons from the quarter whence the human heart derives its strongest sensations—and we refer both to your own feelings, and to the history of this world's opinions, if God is more felt or more present to your imaginations in the peacefulness of spring or the loveliness of a summer landscape, than when winter with its mighty elements sweeps the forest of its leaves,—when the rushing of the storm is heard upon our windows, and man flees to cover himself from the desolation that walketh over the surface of the world.

If nature and her elements be dreadful, how dreadful that mysterious and unseen Being, who sits behind the elements he has formed, and gives birth and movement to all things! It is the mystery in which he is shrouded,—it is that dark and unknown region of spirits, where he reigns in glory, and stands revealed to the immediate view of his worshippers,—it is the inexplicable manner of his being so far removed from that province of sense, within which the

understanding of a man can expatiate,—it is its total unlikeness to all that nature can furnish to the eye of the body, or to the conception of the mind which animates it,—it is all this which throws the Being who formed us at a distance so inaccessible,—which throws an impenetrable mantle over his way, and gives us the idea of some dark and untrodden interval betwixt the glory of God, and all that is visible and created.

Now, Jesus Christ has lifted up this mysterious veil, or rather he has entered within it. He is now at the right hand of God; and though the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he appeared to us in the palpable characters of a man; and those high attributes of truth, and justice, and mercy, which could not be felt or understood, as they existed in the abstract and invisible Deity, are brought down to our conceptions in a manner the most familiar and impressive, by having been made, through Jesus Christ, to flow in utterance from human lips, and to beam in expressive physiognomy from a human countenance.

So long as I had nothing before me but the unseen Spirit of God, my mind wandered in uncertainty, my busy fancy was free to expatiate, and its images filled my heart with disquietude and terror. But in the life, and person, and

history of Jesus Christ, the attributes of the Deity are brought down to the observation of the senses; and I can no longer mistake them, when in the Son, who is the express image of his Father, I see them carried home to my understanding by the evidence and expression of human organs,—when I see the kindness of the Father, in the tears which fell from his Son at the tomb of Lazarus,—when I see his justice blended with his mercy, in the exclamation, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" by Jesus Christ; uttered with a tone more tender than the sympathy of human bosom ever prompted, while he bewailed the sentence of its desolation,—and in the look of energy and significance which he threw upon Peter, I feel the judgment of God himself, flashing conviction upon my conscience, and calling me to repent while his wrath is suspended, and he still waiteth to be gracious.

And it was not a temporary character which he assumed. The human kindness, and the human expression which makes it intelligible to us, remained with him till his latest hour. They survived his resurrection, and he has carried them along with him to the mysterious place which he now occupies. How do I know all this? I know it from his history,—I hear it in the parting words to his mother from the cross,—I see it in his unaltered form when he rose tri-

umphant from the grave,—I perceive it in his tenderness for the scruples of the unbelieving Thomas,—and I am given to understand, that as his body retained the impression of his own sufferings, so his mind retains a sympathy for ours, as warm, and gracious, and endearing, as ever. We have a Priest on high, who is touched with a fellow feeling of our infirmities. My soul, unable to support itself in its aerial flight among the spirits of the invisible, now reposes on Christ, who stands revealed to my conceptions in the figure, the countenance, the heart, the sympathies of a man. He has entered within that veil which hung over the glories of the Eternal,—and the mysterious inaccessible throne of God is divested of all its terrors, when I think that a friend who bears the form of the species, and knows its infirmities, is there to plead for me.

SERMON VII.

THE FOLLY OF MEN MEASURING THEMSELVES BY THEMSELVES.



2 CORINTHIANS x. 12.

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

SAINT Paul addressed these words to the members of a Christian congregation; and were we to confine their application to those people of the present day, who, in circumstances, bear the nearest resemblance to them, we would, in the present discourse, have chiefly to do with the more serious and declared professors of the gospel. Nor should we be long at a loss for a very observable peculiarity amongst them, against which to point the admonition of the Apostle. For, in truth, there is a great disposi-

tion with the members of the religious world, to look away from the unalterable standard of God's will, and to form a standard of authority out of the existing attainments of those whom they conceive to be in the faith. We know nothing that has contributed more than this to reduce the tone of practical Christianity. We know not a more insidious security, than that which steals over the mind of him who, when he looks to another of eminent name for godliness or orthodoxy, and perceives in him a certain degree of conformity to the world, or a certain measure of infirmity of temper, or a certain abandonment of himself to the natural enjoyments of luxury, or of idle gossiping, or of commenting with malignant pleasure on the faults and failings of the absent, thinks, that upon such an example it is safe for him to allow in himself an equal extent of indulgence; and to go the same lengths of laxity or transgression; and thus, instead of measuring himself by the perfect law of the Almighty, and making conformity to it the object of his strenuous aspirings,—does he measure himself and compare himself with his fellow-mortals,—and pitches his ambition to no greater height than the accidental level which obtains amongst the members of his own religious brotherhood, and finds a quiet repose in the mediocrity of their actual

accomplishments, and of their current and conventional observations.

There is much in this consideration to alarm many of those who, within the pale of a select and peculiar circle, look upon themselves as firmly seated in an enclosure of safety. They may be recognised by the society around them, as one of us; and they may keep the even pace of acquirement along with them; and they may wear all those marks of distinction which separate them from the general and unprofessing public; and, in respect of church, and of sacrament, and of family observances, and of exclusive preference for each other's conversation, and of meetings for prayer, and the other exercises of Christian fellowship, they may stand most decidedly out from the world, and most decidedly in with those of their own cast and their own denomination;—and yet, in fact, there may be individuals, even of such a body as this, who, instead of looking upwards to the Being with whom they have to do, are looking no farther than to the testimony and example of those who are immediately around them; who count it enough that they are highly esteemed among men; who feel no earnestness, and put forth no strength in the pursuit of a lofty sanctification; who are not living as in the sight of God, and are not in the habit of bringing their conduct

into measurement with the principles of that great day, when God's righteousness shall be vindicated in the eyes of all his creatures; who, satisfied, in short, with the countenance of the people of their own communion, come under the charge of my text, that measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, they are not wise.

Now, though this habit of measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves, be charged by the Apostle, in the text, against the professors of a strict and peculiar Christianity,—it is a habit so universally exemplified in the world, and ministers such a deep and fatal security to the men of all characters who live in it, and establishes in their hearts so firm a principle of resistance against the humbling doctrines of the New Testament,—that we trust we shall be excused if we leave out, for a time, the consideration of those who are within the limits of the church, and dwell on the operation of this habit among those who are without these limits,—and going beyond that territory of observation to which the words now read would appear to restrict us, we shall attend to the effects of that principle in human nature which are there adverted to, in as far as it serves to fortify the human mind against an entire reception of the truths and the overtures of the gospel.

It may be remarked, by way of illustration, that the habit condemned in the text is an abundant cause of that vanity which is founded on a sense of our importance. If, instead of measuring ourselves by our companions and equals in society, we brought ourselves into measurement with our superiors, it might go far to humble and chastise our vanity. The rustic conqueror on some arena of strength or of dexterity, stands proudly elevated among his fellow rustics who are around him. Place him beside the returned warrior, who can tell of the hazards, and the achievements, and the desperations of the great battle in which he had shared the renown and the danger; and he will stand convicted of the humility of his own performances. The man who is most keen, and at the same time, most skilful in the busy politics of his corporation, triumphs in the consciousness of that sagacity by which he has baffled and overpowered the devices of his many antagonists. But take him to the high theatre of Parliament, and bring him into fellowship with the man who has there won the mighty game of superiority, and he will feel abashed at the insignificance of his own tamer and homelier pretensions. The richest individual of the district struts throughout his neighbourhood in all the glories of a provincial eminence. Carry him to the metropolis

of the empire, and he hides his diminished head under the brilliancy of rank far loftier than his own, and equipage more splendid than that by which he gathers, from his surrounding tributaries, the homage of a respectful admiration. The principle of all this vanity was seen by the discerning eye of the Apostle. It is put down for our instruction in the text before us. And if we, instead of looking to our superiority above the level of our immediate acquaintanceship, pointed an eye of habitual observation to our inferiority beneath the level of those in society who were more dignified and more accomplished than ourselves,—such a habit as this might shed a graceful humility over our characters, and save us from the pangs and the delusions of a vanity which was not made for man.

And let it not be said of those, who, in the more exalted walks of life, can look to few, or to none above them, that they can derive no benefit from the principle of my text, because they are placed beyond the reach of its application. It is true of him who is on the very pinnacle of human society, that, standing sublimely there, he can cast a downward eye on all the ranks and varieties of the world. But, though in the act of looking beneath him to men, he may gather no salutary lesson of humility,—the lesson should come as forcibly upon him as upon

any of his fellow-mortals, in the act of looking above him to God. Instead of comparing himself with the men of this world, let him leave the world and expatiate in thought over the tracks of immensity,—let him survey the mighty apparatus of worlds scattered in such profusion over its distant regions,—let him bring the whole field of the triumphs of his ambition into measurement with the magnificence that is above him, and around him,—above all, let him rise through the ascending series of angels, and principalities, and powers, to the throne of the august Monarch on whom all is suspended,—and then will the lofty imagination of his heart be cast down, and all vanity die within him.

Now, if all this be obviously true of that vanity which is founded on a sense of our importance, might it not be as true of that complacency which is founded on a sense of our worth? Should it not lead us to suspect the ground of this complacency, and to fear lest a similar delusion be misleading us into a false estimate of our own righteousness? When we feel a sufficiency in the act of measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves, it is not the average virtue of those around us that is the standard of measurement. Do we not at the time, form our estimate of human worth upon the character of man as

it actually is, instead of forming it upon the high standard of that pure and exalted law which tells us what the character ought to be? Is it not thus that many are lulled into security, because they are as good or better than their neighbours? This may do for earth, but the question we want to press is, will it do for Heaven? It may carry us through life with a fair and equal character in society, and even when we come to die, it may gain us an epitaph upon our tombstones. But after death cometh the judgment; and in that awful day when judgment is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, every refuge of lies will be swept away, and every hiding-place of security be laid open.

Under the influence of this delusion, thousands and tens of thousands are posting their infatuated way to a ruined and undone eternity. The good man of society lives on the applause and cordiality of his neighbours. He compares himself with his fellow-men; and their testimony to the graces of his amiable, and upright, and honourable character, falls like the music of paradise upon his ears. And it were also the earnest of paradise, if these his flatterers and admirers in time were to be his judges in the day of reckoning. But, alas! they will only be his fellow-prisoners at the bar. The eternal Son of

God will preside over the solemnities of that day. He will take the judgment upon himself, and he will conduct it on his own lofty standard of examination, and not on the maxims or the habits of a world lying in wickedness. O ye deluded men! who carry your heads so high, and look so safe and so satisfied amid the smooth and equal measurements of society,—do you ever think how you are to stand the admeasurement of Christ and of his angels? and think you that the fleeting applause of mortals, sinful as yourselves, will carry an authority over the mind of your Judge, or prescribe to him that solemn award which is to fix you for eternity?

In the prosecution of the following discourse, let us first attempt to expose the folly of measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves amongst ourselves; and then point out the wisdom opposite to this folly, which is recommended in the gospel.

I. The folly of measuring ourselves by ourselves is a lesson which admits of many illustrations. The habit is so universal. It is so strikingly exemplified, even among the most acknowledged outcasts from all that is worthy, and all that is respectable in general estimation. There is not a congregated mass of human beings, associated in one common pursuit, or

brought together by one common accident, among whom there is not established either some tacit or proclaimed morality, to the observance of which, or to the violation of which, there is awarded admiration or disgrace, by the voice of the society that is formed by them. You cannot bring two or more human beings to act in concert without some conventional principle of right and wrong arising out of it, which either must be practically held in regard, or the concert is dissipated. And yet it may be altogether a concert of iniquity. It may be a concert of villany and injustice against the larger interests of human society. It may be a banded conspiracy against the peace and the property of the commonwealth; and there may not be a member belonging to it who does not carry the stamp of outlawry upon his person, and who is not liable, and rightly liable, to the penalties of an outraged government, against which he is bidding, by the whole habit of his life, a daily and systematic defiance. And yet even among such a class of the species as this, an enlightened observer of our nature will not fail to perceive a standard of morality, both recognised and acted upon by all its individuals, and in reference to which morality, there actually stirs in many a bosom amongst them a very warm and enthusiastic feeling of obligation,

—and some will you find, who, by their devoted adherence to its maxims, earn among their companions all the distinctions of honour and of virtue,—and others who, by falling away from the principles of the compact, become the victims of a deep and general execration. And thus may the very same thing be perceived with them, that we see in the more general society of mankind—a scale of character, and corresponding to it, a scale of respectability, along which the members of the most wicked and worthless association upon earth may be ranged according to the gradation of such virtues as are there held in demand, and in reverence; and thus there will be a feeling of complacency, and a distribution of applause, and a conscious superiority of moral and personal attainment, and all this grounded on the habit of measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves.

The first case of such an exhibition which we offer to your notice, comes so aptly in for the purpose of illustration, that homely and familiar as it is, we cannot resist the introduction of it. We allude to the case of smugglers. These men, in as far, at least, as it respects one tie of allegiance, may be considered as completely broken loose from the government of their country. They have formed themselves

into a plot against the interests of the public revenue, and it may be generally said of them, that they have no feeling whatever of the criminality of their undertaking. On this point there is utterly wanting, the sympathy of any common principle between the administrators of the law, and the transgressors of the law,—and yet it would be altogether untrue to nature and to experience, to say of the latter, that they are entire strangers to the feeling of every moral obligation. They have a very strong sense of obligation to each other. There are virtues amongst them which serve to signalize certain members, and vices amongst them which doom to infamy certain other members of their own association. In reference to the duties which they owe to government, they may be dead to every impression of them. But in reference to those duties, on the punctual fulfilment of which depends the success, or even the continuance, of their system of operations, they may be most keenly and sensitively alive. They may speak of the informer who has abandoned them, with all the intensity of moral hatred and contempt, —and of the man, again, who never once swerved from his fidelity,—of the man, who, with all the notable dexterity of his evasions from the vigilance that was sent forth to tract and to discover him, was ever known to be

open as day amongst the members of his own brotherhood,—of the man, who, with the unprincipledness of a most skilful and systematic falsehood, in reference to the agents and pursuers of the law, was the most trusty, and the most incorruptible, in reference to his fellows of the trade,—of the man who stands highest amongst them, in all the virtues of pledged and sworn companionship,—why, of such a man will these roving mountaineers speak in terms of honest and heart-felt veneration: and nothing more is necessary, in order to throw a kind of chivalric splendour over him, than just to be told, along with his inflexible devotedness to the cause, of his hardy adventures, and his hair-breadth miracles of escape, and his inexhaustible resources, and of the rapidity of his ever-suiting and ever-shifting contrivances, and of his noble and unquelled spirit of daring, and of the art and activity by which he has eluded his opponents, and of the unfaltering courage by which he has resisted them. We doubt not, that even in the history of this ignominious traffic, there do occur such deeds and characters of unrecorded heroism; and still the men who carry it on, measuring themselves by themselves, may never think of the ignominy. They will enjoy the praise they have one of another, and care not for the distant blame that is cast

upon them by the public voice. They will carry in their bosoms the swelling consciousness of worth, and be regaled by the home testimony of those who are about them,—and all this at the very time, when, to the general community, they offer a spectacle of odiousness,—all this at the very time, when the power and the justice of an incensed government are moving forth upon them.

But another case still more picturesque, and, what is far better, still more subservient to the establishment of the lesson of our text, may be taken from another set of adventurers, hardier, and more ferocious, and more unprincipled than the former. We allude to the men of rapine; and who, rather than that their schemes of rapine should be frustrated, have so far overcome all the scruples and all the sensibilities of nature, that they have become men of blood. They live as commoners upon the world; and at large from those restraints, whether of feeling or of principle, which hold in security together the vast majority of this world's families, they are looked at by general society with a revolting sense of terror and of odiousness. And yet, among these monsters of the cavern, and practised as they are in all the atrocities of the high-way, will you find a virtue of their own, and a high-toned morality of their own. Living

as they do in a state of emancipation from the law universal, still there is among them a law isoterical, in doing homage to which, the hearts of these banditti actually glow with the movements of honourable principle; and the path of their conduct is actually made to square with the conformities of right and honourable practice. Extraordinary as you may think it, the very habit of my text is in full operation among these very men, who have wandered so far from all that is deemed righteous in society; and disowning, as they do, our standard of principle altogether, they have a standard among themselves, on which they can adjust a scale of moral estimation, and apply it, in every exercise of judgment, on the character of each individual who belongs to them. In reference to every deviation that is made by them from the general standard of right, there is an entire obliteration of all their sensibilities,—and this is not the ground on which they ever think either of reproaching themselves, or of casting any imputation of disgrace on their companions. But, in reference to their own particular standard of right, they are all awake to the enormity of every act of transgression against it,—and thus it is, that measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, there is just with them as varied a distribution

of praise and of obloquy, as is to be met with on the face of any regular and well-ordered commonwealth. And who, we would ask, is the man, among all these prowling outcasts of nature, on whom the law of his country would inflict the most unrelenting vengeance? He who is most signalized by the moralities of his order,—he who has gained by fidelity, and courage, and disinterested honour, the chieftainship of confidence and affection amongst them,—he, the foremost of all the desperadoes, on whose character, perhaps, the romance of generosity and truth is strangely blended with the stern barbarities of his calling,—and who, the most admired among the members of his own brotherhood, is, at the same time, the surest to bring down upon his person all the rigours and all the severities of the judgment-seat.

Let us now follow, with the eye of our observation, a number of these transgressors into another scene. Let us go into the place of their confinement; and, in this receptacle of many criminals, with all their varied hues of guilt and of depravity, we shall perceive the habit of my text in full and striking exemplification. The murderer stands lower in the scale of character than the thief. The first is worse than the second—and you have only to reverse

the terms of the comparison, that you may be enabled to say how the second is better than the first. Thus, even in this repository of human worthlessness, we meet with gradations of character,—with the worse, and the better, and the best,—with an ascending and a descending scale, which runs in continuity, from the one who stands upon its pinnacle, to the one who is the deepest and most determined in wickedness amongst them. It is utter ignorance of our nature to conceive that this moral gradation is not fully and frequently in the minds of the criminals themselves,—that there is not, even here, the habit of each measuring himself with his fellow-prisoners around him, and of some soothed by the consciousness of a more untainted character, and rejoicing over it with a feeling of secret elevation. They, in truth, know themselves to be the best of their kind,—and this knowledge brings a complacency along with it,—and, even in this mass of profligacy, there swells and kindles the pride of superior attainments. But there is at least one delusion, from which one and all of them stand exempted. The very best of them, however much he may be regaled by the inward sense of his advantage over others, knows, that in reference to the law, he is not on a footing of merit, but on a footing of criminality,—knows, that though he

will be the most gently dealt with, and that on him the lightest penalty will fall, yet still he stands to his judge and to his country, in the relation of a condemned malefactor,—feels, how preposterous it were, if, on the plea of being the most innocent of the whole assemblage, he was to claim, not merely exemption from punishment, but the reward of some high and honourable distinction at the hands of the magistrate. He is fully aware of the gap that lies between him and the administrators of justice,—is sensible, that though he deserves to be beaten with fewer stripes than others, yet still, that, in the eye of the law, he deserves to be beaten; and that he stands at as hopeless a distance, as the most depraved of his fellows, from a sentence of complete justification.

Let us, last of all, go along with these malefactors to the scene of their banishment. Let us view them as the members of a separated community; and we shall widely mistake it, if we think, that in this settlement of New South Wales, there is not the same shading of moral variety, there is not the same gradation of character, there is not the same scale of reputation, there is not the same distribution of respect, there is not the same pride of loftier principle, and debasement of more shameful and abandoned profligacy, there is not the same triumph

of conscious superiority on the one hand, and the same crouching sense of unworthiness on the other, which you find in the more decent, and virtuous, and orderly society of Europe. Within the limits of this colony there exists a tribunal of public opinion, from which praise, and popularity, and reproach, are awarded in various proportions among all the inhabitants. And without the limits of this colony there exists another tribunal of public opinion, by the voice of which an unexcepted stigma of exclusion and disgrace is cast upon every one of them. Insomuch, that the same individual may, by a nearer judgment, be extolled as the best and the most distinguished of all who are around him,—and, by a more distant judgment, he may have all the ignominy of an outcast laid upon his person and his character. He may, at one and the same time, be regaled by the applause of one society, and held in rightful execration by another society. In the former, he may have the deference of a positive regard rendered to him for his virtues,—while, from the latter, he is justly exiled by the hateful contamination of his vices. And in him do we behold the instructive picture of a man, who, at the bar of his own neighbourhood, stands the highest in moral estimation,—while, at a higher bar, he has had a mark of foulest ignominy stamped upon him.

We want not to shock the pride or the delicacy of your feelings. But, on a question so high as that of your eternity, we want to extricate you from the power of every vain and bewildering delusion. We want to urge upon you the lesson of Scripture, that this world differs from a prison-house, only in its being a more spacious receptacle of sinners,—and that there is not a wider distance, in point of habit and of judgment, between a society of convicts, and the general community of mankind, than there is between the whole community of our species, and the society of that paradise, from which, under the apostacy of our fallen nature, we have been doomed to live in dreary alienation. We refuse not to the men of our world the possession of many high and honourable virtues: but let us not forget, that amongst the marauders of the highway, we hear too, of inflexible faith, and devoted friendship, and splendid generosity. We deny not, that there exist among our species, as much truth and as much honesty, as serve to keep society together: but a measure of the very same principle is necessary, in order to perpetuate and to accomplish the end of the most unrighteous combinations. We deny not, that there flourishes on the face of our earth a moral diversity of hue and of character, and that there are the better and the

best, who have signalized themselves above the level of its general population: but so it is in the malefactor's dungeon; and as there, so here, may a positive sentence of condemnation be the lot of the most exalted individual. We deny not, that there are many in every neighbourhood, to whose character, and whose worth, the cordial tribute of admiration is awarded: but the very same thing may be witnessed amongst the outcasts of every civilized territory,—and what they are, in reference to the country from which they have been exiled, we may be in reference to the whole of God's unfallen creation. In the sight of men we may be highly esteemed,—and we may be an abomination in the sight of angels. We may receive homage from our immediate neighbours for all the virtues of our relationship with them,—while our relationship with God may be utterly dissolved, and its appropriate virtues may neither be recognized nor acted on. There may emanate from our persons a certain beauteousness of moral colouring on those who are around us,—but when seen through the universal morality of God's extended and all-pervading government, we may look as hateful as the outcasts of felony; and living, as we do, in a rebellious province, that has broken loose from the community of God's loyal and obedient worshippers,

we may, at one and the same time, be surrounded by the cordialities of an approving fellowship, and be frowned upon by the supreme judicatory of the universe. At one and the same time, we may be regaled by the incense of this world's praise, and be the objects of Heaven's most righteous execration.

But is this the real place, it may be asked, that our world occupies in the moral universe of God? The answer to this question may be obtained either out of the historical informations of Scripture, or out of a survey that may be made of the actual character of man, and a comparison that may be instituted between this character and the divine law. We can conceive nothing more uniform and more decisive than the testimony of the Bible, when it tells us that however fair some may be in the eyes of men, yet that all are guilty before God,—that in his eyes none are righteous, no not one,—that he, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, finds out iniquity in every one of us,—that there is none who understandeth, and none who seeketh after God,—that however much we may compare ourselves amongst ourselves, and found a complacency upon the exercise, yet that we have altogether gone out of the way,—that however distinctly we may retain, even in the midst of this great moral rebellion, our relative

superiorities over each other, there is a wide and a general departure of the species from God,—that one and all of us have deeply revolted against him,—that the taint of a most inveterate spiritual disease has overspread all the individuals of all the families upon earth; insomuch, that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and the imaginations of his thoughts are only evil, and that continually.

The fall of Adam is represented, in the Bible, as that terribly decisive event, on which took place this deep and fatal unhingement of the moral constitution of our species. From this period the malady has descended, and the whole history of our world gives evidence to its state of banishment from the joys and the communications of paradise. Before the entrance of sin did God and man walk in sweet companionship together, and saw each other face to face in the security of a garden. A little further down in the history, we meet with another of God's recorded manifestations. We read of his descent in thunder upon mount Sinai. O what a change from the free and fearless intercourse of Eden! God, though surrounded by a people whom he had himself selected, here sits, if we may use the expression, on a throne of awful and distant ceremony; and the lifting of his

mighty voice scattered dismay among the thousands of Israel. When he looked now on the children of men, he looked at them with an altered countenance. The days were, when they talked together in the lovely scenes of paradise as one talketh with a friend. But, on the top of Sinai, he wraps himself in storms, and orders to set bounds about the mount, lest the people should draw near, and God should break forth upon them.

But we have an evidence to our state of banishment from God, which is nearer home. We have it in our own hearts. The habitual attitude of the inner man is not an attitude of subordination to God. The feeling of allegiance to him is practically and almost constantly away from us. All that can give value to our obedience, in the sight of an enlightened Spirit who looks to motive, and sentiment, and principle, has constitutionally no place, and no residence in our characters. We are engrossed by other anxieties than anxiety to do the will, and to promote the honour, of him who formed us. We are animated by other affections altogether, than love to him, whose right hand preserves us continually. That Being by whom we are so fearfully and wonderfully made,—whose upholding presence it is that keeps us in life, and in movement, and in the exercise of all

our faculties,—who has placed us on the theatre of all our enjoyments, and claims over his own creatures the ascendency of a most rightful authority,—that surely is the Being with whom we have to do. And yet, when we take account of our thoughts and of our doings, how little of God is there! In the random play and exhibition of such feelings as instinctively belong to us, we may gather around us the admiration of our fellows,—and so it is in a colony of exiled criminals. But as much wanting there, as is the homage of loyalty to the government of their native land—so much wanting here, is the homage of any deference or inward regard, to the government of Heaven. And yet this is the very principle of all that obedience, which Heaven can look upon. If it be true that no obedience is rewardable by God, but that which has respect unto God, then this must be the essential point on which hinges the difference between a rebel and a loyal subject to the supreme Lawgiver. The requirement we live under is to do all things to his glory,—and this is the measure of principle and of performance that will be set over you;—and tell us, ye men of civil and relative propriety, who, by exemplifying in the eye of your fellows such virtue, as may be exemplified by the outcasts of banishment, have shed around

your persons the tiny lustre of this world's moralities,—tell us, how you will be able to stand such a severe and righteous application? The measure by which we compare ourselves with ourselves, is not the measure of the sanctuary. When the Judge comes to take account of us, he will come fraught with the maxims of a celestial jurisprudence, and his question will be, not, what have you done at the shrine of popularity,—not, what have you done to sustain a character amongst men,—not, what have you done at the mere impulse of sensibilities however amiable, or of native principles however upright, and elevated, and manly,—but what have you done unto me? how much of God, and of God's will, was there in the principle of your doings? This is the heavenly measure, and it will set aside all your earthly measures and comparisons. It will sweep away all these refuges of lies. The man whose accomplishments of character, however lively, were all social, and worldly, and relative, will hang his head in confusion, when the utter wickedness of his pretensions is thus laid open, —when the God who gave him every breath, and endowed him with every faculty, inquires after his share of reverence and acknowledgment—when he tells him from the judgment-seat, I was the Being with whom you had to do,

and yet in the vast multiplicity of your doings, I was seldom or never thought of—when he convicts him of habitual forgetfulness of God, and setting aside all the paltry measurements which men apply in their estimates of one another, he brings the high standard of Heaven's law, and Heaven's allegiance to bear upon them.

It must be quite palpable to any man who has seen much of life, and still more if he has travelled extensively, and witnessed the varied complexions of morality that obtain in distant societies,—it must be quite obvious to such a man, how readily the moral feeling, in each of them, accommodates itself to the general state of practice and observation,—that the practices of one country, for which there is a most complacent toleration, would be shuddered at as so many atrocities in another country,—that in every given neighbourhood, the sense of right and of wrong, becomes just as fine or as obtuse as to square with its average purity, and its average humanity, and its average uprightness, —that what would revolt the public feeling of a retired parish in Scotland as gross licentiousness or outrageous cruelty, might attach no disgrace whatever to a residenter in some colonial settlement,—that, nevertheless, in the more corrupt and degraded of the two communities, there is a scale of differences, a range of char-

acter, along which are placed the comparative stations of the disreputable, and the passable, and the respectable, and the superexcellent; and yet it is a very possible thing, that if a man in the last of these stations, were to import all his habits and all his profligacies into his native land, superexcellent as he may be abroad, at home he would be banished from the general association of virtuous and well ordered families. Now, all we ask of you is, to transfer this consideration to the matter before us,—to think how possible a thing it is, that the moral principle of the world at large, may have sunk to a peaceable and approving acquiescence in the existing practice of the world at large,—that the security which is inspired by the habit of measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves amongst ourselves, may therefore be a delusion altogether,—that the very best member of society upon earth, may be utterly unfit for the society of heaven,—that the morality which is current here, may depend upon totally another set of principles from the morality which is held to be indispensable there;—and when we gather these principles from the book of God's revelation,—when we are told that the law of the two great commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our strength, and heart, and mind, and to bear the

same love to our neighbour, that we do to ourselves,—the argument advances from a conjecture to a certainty, that every inhabitant of earth, when brought to the bar of Heaven's judicature is altogether wanting; and that unless some great moral renovation take effect upon him, he can never be admitted within the limits of the empire of righteousness.

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST THE WISDOM OF GOD.

1 CORINTHIANS i. 24.

"Christ the wisdom of God."

WE cannot but remark of the Bible, how uniformly and how decisively it announces itself in all its descriptions of the state and character of man,—how, without offering to palliate the matter, it brings before us the totality of our alienation,—how it represents us to be altogether broken off from our allegiance to God,—and how it fears not, in the face of those undoubted diversities of character which exist in the world, to assert of the whole world, that it is guilty before him. And if we would only seize on what may be called the elementary principle of guilt,—if we would only take it along with us, that guilt, in reference to God,

must consist in the defection of our regard, and our reverence from him,—if we would only open our eyes to the undoubted fact, that there may be such an utter defection, and yet there may be many an amiable, and many a graceful exhibition, both of feeling and of conduct, in reference to those who are around us,—then should we recognise, in the statements of the Bible, a vigorous, discerning, and intelligent view of human nature,—an unfaltering announcement of what that nature essentially is, under all the plausibilities which serve to disguise it,—and such an insight, in fact, into the secrecies of our inner man, as if carried home by that Spirit, whose office it is to apply the word with power into the conscience, is enough, of itself, to stamp upon this book, the evidence of the Divinity which inspired it.

But it is easier far to put an end to the resistance of the understanding, than to alarm the fears, or to make the heart soft and tender, under a sense of its guiltiness, or to prompt the inquiry,—If all those securities, within the entrenchment of which I want to take my quiet and complacent repose, are thus driven in, where in the whole compass of nature or revelation can any effectual security be found? It may be easy to find our way amongst all the complexional varieties of our nature, to its radical

and pervading ungodliness; and thus to carry the acquiescence of the judgment in some extended demonstration about the utter sinfulness of the species. But it is not so easy to point this demonstration towards the bosom of any individual,—to gather it up, as it were, from its state of diffusion over the whole field of humanity, and send it, with all its energies concentered to a single heart, in the form of a sharp, and humbling, and terrifying conviction, —to make it enter the conscience of some one listener, like an arrow sticking fast,—or, when the appalling picture of a whole world lying in wickedness, is thus presented to the understanding of a general audience, to make each of that audience mourn apart over his own wickedness; just as when, on the day of judgment, though all that is visible be shaking, and dissolving, and giving way, each despairing eyewitness shall mourn apart over the recollection of his own guilt, over the prospect of his own rueful and undone eternity. And yet if this be not done, nothing is done. The lesson of the text has come to you in word only, and not in power. To look to the truth in its generality, is one thing. To look to your own separate concern in it, is another. What we want is, that each of you shall turn his eye homewards, —that each shall purify his own heart from the

influence of a delusion which we pronounce to be ruinous,—that each shall beware of leaning a satisfaction, or a triumph, on the comparison of himself with corrupt and exiled men, whom sin has degraded into outcasts from the presence of God and the joys of paradise,—that each of you shall look to the measure of God's law, so that when the commandment comes upon you, in the sense of its exceeding broadness, a sense of your sin, and of your death in sin, may come along with it. "Without the commandment I was alive," says the Apostle, "but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Be assured, that if the utterance of such truth in your hearing, impress no personal earnestness, and lead to no personal measures, and be followed up by no personal movements, then to you it is as a sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal. The preacher has been beating the air. That great Agent, whose revealed office it is to convince of sin, has refused to go along with him. Another influence altogether, than that which is salutary and saving, has been sent into your bosom; and the glow of the truth universal has deafened or intercepted the application of the truth personal, and of the truth particular.

This leads us to the second thing proposed in our last discourse, under which we shall at-

tempt to explain the wisdom opposite to that folly of measuring ourselves, by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves, which we have already attempted to expose.

The first step is to give up all satisfaction with yourselves, on the bare ground, that your conduct comes up to the measure of human character, and human reputation around you. This consideration may be of importance to your place in society; but, as to your place in the favour of God, it is utterly insignificant. The moral differences which obtain in a community of exiles, are all quite consistent with the entire obliteration amongst them, of the allegiance that is due to the government of their native land. And the moral differences which obtain in the world, may in every way, be as consistent with the fact, that one and all of us, in our state of nature, are alienated from God by wicked works. And, in like manner, as convicts may be all alive to a sense of their reciprocal obligations, while dead, in feeling and in principle, to the supreme obligation under which they lie to the sovereign,—so may we, in reference to our fellow men, have a sense of rectitude, and honour, and compassion, while, in reference to God, we may labour under the entire extinction of every moral sensibility,—so that the virtues which signalize us, may, in

the language of some of our old divines, be neither more nor less than splendid sins. With the possession of these virtues, we may not merely be incurring every day the guilt of trespassing and sinning against our Maker in heaven,—but devoid, as we are, of all apprehension of the enormity of this, we may strikingly realize the assertion of the Bible, that we are *dead* in trespasses and sins. And we pass our time in all the tranquillity of death. We say peace, when there is no peace. Though in a state of disruption from God, we live as securely and as inconsiderately as if there were no question and no controversy betwixt us. About this whole matter, there is within us, a spirit of heaviness and of deep slumber. We lie fast asleep on the brink of an unprovided eternity—and, if possible to awaken you, let us urge you to compare, not your own conduct with that of acquaintances and neighbours, but to compare your own finding of the ungodliness that is in your heart with the doctrine of God's word about it—to bring down the loftiness of your spirit to its humbling declarations—to receive it as a faithful saying, that man is lost by nature, and that unless there be some mighty transition, in his history, from a state of nature to a state of salvation, the wrath of God abideth on him.

The next inquiry comes to be, What is this

transition? Tell me the step I should take, and I will take it. It is not enough, then, that you exalt upon your own person the degree of those virtues, by which you have obtained a credit and a distinction among men. It is not enough, that you throw a brighter and a lovelier hue over your social accomplishments. It is not enough that you multiply the offerings of your charity, or observe a more rigid compliance, than heretofore, with all the requisitions of justice. All this you may do, and yet the great point, on which your controversy with God essentially hinges, may not be so much as entered upon. All this you may do, and yet obtain no nearer approximation to Him who sitteth on the throne, than the outlaws of an offended government for their fidelities to each other. To the eye of man you may be fairer than before, and in civil estimation be greatly more righteous than before,—and yet, with the unquelled spirit of impiety within you, and as habitual an indifference as ever to all the subordinate claims of the divine will over your heart and your conduct, you may stand at as wide a distance from God as before. And besides, how are we to dispose of the whole guilt of your past iniquities? Whether is it the malefactor or the Lawgiver who is to arbitrate this question? God may remit our sins; but it is

for him to proclaim this. God may pass them over; but it is for him to issue the deed of amnesty. God may have found out a way whereby, in consistency with his own character, and with the stability of his august government, he may take sinners into reconciliation; but it is for him both to devise and to publish this way;—and we must just do what convicts do, when they obtain a mitigation or a cancelment of the legal sentence under which they lie,—we must passively accept of it, on the terms of the deed, we must look to the warrant as issued by the sovereign, and take the boon or fulfil the conditions, just as it is there presented to us. The question is between us and God; and, in the adjustment of this question, we must look singly to the expression of his will, and feel that it is with him, and with his authority, that we have exclusively to do. In one word, we must wait his own revelation, and learn from his own mouth how it is that he would have us to come nigh unto him.

Let us go then to the record. "No man cometh unto the Father but through the Son." "There is no other name given under heaven, but the name of Jesus, whereby we can be saved." "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin;" and "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith

in his blood." "He was once offered to bear the sins of many,—and "became sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of Gȯd in him." "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses." "Justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord;"—"and we become the children of God, through the faith that is in Christ Jesus." We are "reconciled to God by the death of his Son,"—"and by his obedience are many made righteous,"—and "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." These verses sound foolishness to many; but the cross of Christ is foolishness to those that perish. They appear to them invested with all the mysteriousness of a dark and hidden saying; but if this gospel be hid, it is hid to them which are lost. They have eyes that they cannot see the wondrous things contained in this book of God's communication; but they have minds which believe not, because they are blinded by the god of this world, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.

And here we cannot but insist on the utter hopelessness of their circumstances, who hear these overtures of reconciliation, but will not listen to them. Theirs is just the case of rebels

turning their back on a deed of grace and of amnesty. We are quite confident in stating it to be the stubborn experience of human nature, that all who reject Christ, as he is offered in the gospel, persist in that radical ungodliness of character on which the condemnation of our world mainly and essentially rests. And as they thus refuse to build their security on the foundation of his merits,—what, we would ask, is the other foundation on which they build it? If ever they think seriously of the matter, or feel any concern about a foundation on which they might rest their confidence before God, they conceive it to lie in such feelings, and such humanities, and such honesties, as make them even with the world, or as elevate them to a certain degree above the level of the world's population. These are the materials of the foundation on which they build. It is upon the possession of virtues which in truth have not God for their object, that they propose to support in the presence of God the attitude of fearlessness. It is upon the testimony of fellow-rebels that they brave the judgment of the Being who has pronounced of them all, that they have deeply revolted against him. And all this in the face of God's high prerogative, to make and to publish his own overtures. All this in contempt of that Mediator, whom he has

appointed. All this in resistance to the authentic deed of grace and of forgiveness, which has been sent to our world, and from which we gather the full assurance of God's willingness to be reconciled; but, at the same time, are expressly bound down to that particular way in which he hath chosen to dispense reconciliation. Who does not see, that, in these circumstances, the guilt of sin is fearfully aggravated on the part of sinners, by their rejection of the gospel? Who does not see, that thus to refuse the grant of everlasting life in the terms of the grant, is just to set an irretrievable seal upon their own condemnation? Who does not see, that, in the act of declining to take the shelter which is held out to them, they vainly imagine, that God will let down his approbation, to such performances as are utterly devoid of any spirit of devout or dutiful allegiance to the Lawgiver? This is, in fact, a deliberate posting of themselves, and that more firmly and more obstinately than ever, on the ground of their rebellion,—and let us no longer wonder, then, at the terms of that alternative of which we read so often in the Bible. We there read, that if we believe we shall be saved: but we also read, that if we believe not, we shall be damned. We are there told of the great salvation: but how shall we escape, if we neglect it? We are there

invited to lay hold of the gospel, as the savour of life unto life: but, if we refuse the invitation, it shall be to us the savour of death unto death. The gospel is there freely proclaimed to us, for our acceptance: but if we will not obey the gospel, we shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Saviour's power. We are asked to kiss the Son while he is in the way: but if we do not, the alternative is that he will be angry, and that his wrath will burn against us. He is revealed to us as a sure rock, on which, if we lean we shall not be confounded: but if we shift our dependence away from it, it will fall upon us and grind us to powder.

And this alternative, so far from a matter to be wondered at, appears resolvable into a principle that might be easily comprehended. God is the party sinned against,—and if he have the will to be reconciled, it is surely for him to prescribe the way of it,—and this he has actually done in the revelation of the New Testament,—and whether he give a reason for the way or not, certain it is, that in order to give it accomplishment, he sent his eternal Son into our world; and this descent was accompanied with such circumstances of humiliation, and conflict, and deep suffering, that heaven looked on with astonishment, and earth was bidden to rejoice,

because of her great salvation. It is enough for us to know that God lavished on this plan the riches of a wisdom that is unsearchable,—that, in the hearing of sinful men, he has proclaimed its importance and its efficacy,—that every gospel messenger felt himself charged, with tidings pregnant of joy, and of mighty deliverance to the world. And we ask you just to conceive, in these circumstances, what effect it should have on the mind of the insulted Sovereign, if the world, instead of responding, with grateful and delighted welcome, to the message, shall either nauseate its terms, or, feeling in them no significancy, shall turn with indifference away from it? Are we at all to wonder if the King, very wroth with the men of such a world, shall at length send his armies to destroy it? Do you think it likely that the same God, who after we had broken his commandment, was willing to pass by our transgressions, will be equally willing to pass them by, after we have thus despised the proclamation of his mercy,—after his forbearance and his long-suffering have been resisted,—and that scheme of pardon, with the weight and the magnitude of which angels appear to labour in amazement, is received by the very men for whom it was devised, as a thing of no estimation? Surely, if there had been justice in the simple and immediate punishment

of sin—this justice will be discharged in still brighter manifestation on him, who, in the face of such an embassy, holds out in his determination to brave it. And, if it be a righteous thing in God to avenge every violation of his law, how clearly and how irresistibly righteous will it appear, when, on the great day of his wrath, he taketh vengeance on those who have added to the violation of his law, the rejection of the gospel!

But, what is more than this—God hath condescended to make known to us a reason, for that peculiar way of reconciliation, which he hath set before us. It is that he might be just, while the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. In the dispensation of his mercy, he had to provide for the dignity of his throne. He had to guard the stability of his truth, and of his righteousness. He had to pour the lustre of a high and awful vindication, over the attributes of a nature that is holy and unchangeable. He had to make peace on earth and good will to men meet and be at one, with glory to God in the highest; and for this purpose did the eternal Son pour out his soul an offering for sin, and by his obedience unto death, bring in an everlasting righteousness. It is through the channel of this great expiation that the guilt of every believer is washed away; and it is through the imputed

merits of him with whom the Father was well pleased, that every believer is admitted to the rewards of a perfect obedience. Conceive any man of this world to reject the offers of reward and forgiveness in this way, and to look for them in another. Conceive him to challenge the direct approbation of his Judge, on the measure of his own worth, and his own performances, and to put away from him that righteousness of Christ, in the measure of which there is no short-coming. Is he not, by this attitude, holding out against God, and that too on a question in which the justice of God stands committed against him? Is not the poor sinner of a day entering into a fearful controversy, with all the plans, and all the perfections of the Eternal? Might not you conceive every attribute of the Divinity, gathering into a frown of deeper indignation against the daringness of him, who thus demands the favour of the Almighty on some plea of his own, and resolutely declines it on that only plea, under which the acceptance of the sinner can be in harmony with the glories of God's holy and inviolable character? Surely, if we have fallen short of the obedience of his law, and so short, as to have renounced altogether that godliness which imparts to obedience its spiritual and substantial quality,—then do we aggravate the enormity of

our sin, by building our hope before God on a foundation of sin? To sin is to defy God: but the very presumption that he will smile complacency upon it, involves in it another, and a still more deliberate attack upon his government; and all its sanctions, and all its severities, are let loose upon us in greater force and abundance than before, if we either rest upon our own virtue, or mix up this polluted ingredient with the righteousness of Christ; and refuse our single, entire, and undivided reliance on him, who alone has magnified the law, and made it honourable.

But such, if we may be allowed the expression, is the constitution of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that, in proportion to the terror which it holds out to those who neglect it, is the security that it provides to all, who flee for refuge to the hope which is set before them. Paul understood this well, when, though he profited over many of his equals in his own nation,—when, though had he measured himself by them, he might have gathered from the comparison a feeling of proud superiority,—when, though in all that was counted righteous amongst his fellows, he signalized himself in general estimation,—yet he willingly renounced a dependence upon all, that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness

which was of the law, but that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith. He felt the force of the alternative, between the former and the latter righteousness. He knew that the one admitted of no measurement with the other,—and that whatever appearance of worth it had in the eyes of men, when brought to their relative and earthly standard, it was reduced to nothing, and worse than nothing, when brought to the standard of Heaven's holy and unalterable law. Jesus Christ has in our nature fulfilled this law; and it is in the righteousness which he thus wrought, that we are invited to stand before God. You do not then take in a full impression of gospel security, if you only believe that God is merciful, and has forgiven you. You are called farther to believe, that God is righteous, and has justified you. You have a warrant to put on the righteousness of Christ as a robe and as a diadem, and to go to the throne of grace with the petition of, Look upon me in the face of him who hath fulfilled all righteousness. You are furnished with such a measure of righteousness as God can accept, without letting down a single attribute which belongs to him. The truth, and the justice, and the holiness, which stand in such threatening array against the sinner who is out of Christ,

now form into a shield and a hiding-place around him: and while he who trusts in the general mercy of God does so at the expense of his whole character, he who trusts in the mercy of God, which hath appeared unto all men through the Saviour, offers in that act of confidence, an homage to every perfection of the Divinity, and has every perfection of the Divinity upon his side. And thus it is, that under the economy of redemption, we now read, not merely of God being merciful, but of God being just and faithful in forgiving our sins, and in cleansing us from all our unrighteousness.

Thus much for what may be called the *judicial righteousness*, with which every believer is invested, by having the merits of Christ imputed to him through faith. But this faith is something more than a name. It takes up a positive residence in the mind as a principle. It has locality and operation there, and has either no existence at all, or by its purifying and reforming influence on the holder of it, does it invest him also with a personal righteousness.

Now, to apply the conception of our text to this personal righteousness, the first thing we would say of it is, that it admits of no measurement whatever with the social worth, or the moral virtue, or any other of the personal ac-

complishments of character, which may belong to those, who have not the faith of the gospel. Faith accepts of the offered reconciliation, and moves away from the alienated heart those suspicions, and aversions, and fears, which kept man asunder from his God. We would not say, then, of the personal righteousness of a believer, that it consisted in a higher degree of that virtue which may exist in a lower degree with him who is not a believer. It consists in the dawn, and the progress, and the perfecting of a virtue, which, before he was a believer, had no existence whatever. It consists in the possession of a character, of which, previous to his acceptance of Christ, he had not the smallest feature of reality,—though to the external eye, there may have been some features of resemblance. The principle of Christian sanctification, which, if we were to express it by another name, we would call devotedness to God, is no more to be found in the unbelieving world, than the principle of an allegiance to their rightful sovereign, is to be found among the outcasts of banishment. It is not by any stretching out of the measure of your former virtues, then, that you can attain this principle. There needs to be originated within you a new virtue altogether. It is not by the fostering of that which is old,—it is by the creation of something new,

that a man comes to have the personal righteousness of a disciple of the New Testament. It is by giving existence to that which formerly had no existence. And let us no longer wonder, then, at the magnitude of the terms which are employed in the Bible, to denote the change, the personal change, which, in point of character, and affection, and principle, takes place on all who become meet for the inheritance of the saints. It is there called life from the dead, and a new birth, and a total renovation,—all old things are said to be done away, and all things to become new. With many it is a wonder how a change of such totality and of such magnitude, should be accounted as indispensable to the good and creditable man of society, as to the sunken profligate. But if the one and the other are both dead to a sense of their Lawgiver in heaven,—then both need to be made alive unto him. With both there must be the power and the reality of a spiritual resurrection. And after this great transition has been made, it will be found, that the virtues of the new state, and those of the old state, cannot be brought to any common standard of measurement at all. The one distances the other by a wide and impassable interval. There is all the difference in point of principle, between a man of the world and a new creature in Christ, that there is between

him who has the Spirit of God, and him who has it not,—and all the difference in point of performance, that there is between him who is without Christ, and can therefore do nothing, and him who can do all things through Christ strengthening him. There is a new principle now, which formerly had no operation, even that of godliness,—and a new influence now, even that of the Holy Ghost, given to the prayers of the believer;—and under these provisions will he attain a splendour and an energy of character, with which, the better and the best of this world can no more be brought into comparison, than earth will compare with heaven, or the passions and the frivolities of time, with the pure ambition and the lofty principles of eternity.

And let it not be said, that the transformation of which we are now speaking, instead of being thus entire and universal, consists only with a good man of the world in the addition of one virtue, to his previous stock of many virtues. We admit that he had justice before, and humanity before, and courteousness before, and that the godliness which he had not before, is only one virtue. But the station which it asserts, among the other virtues, is a station of supreme authority. It no sooner takes its place among them, than it animates them all, and

subordinates them all. It sends forth among them a new and pervading quality, which makes them essentially different from what they were before. I may take daily exercise from a regard to my health, and by so doing, I may deserve the character of a man of prudence; or I may take daily exercise apart from this consideration altogether, and because it is the accidental wish of my parents that I should do so,—and thus may I deserve the character of a man of filial piety. The external habit is the same; but under the one principle, the moral character of this habit is totally and essentially different from what it is under the other principle. Yet the difference here, is, most assuredly, not greater than is the difference between the justice of a good man of society, and the justice of a Christian disciple. In the former case, it is done unto others, or done unto himself. In the latter case, it is done unto God. The framework of his outer doings is animated by another spirit altogether. There is the breath of another life in it. The inscription of Holiness to God stands engraven on the action of the believer; and if this character of holiness be utterly effaced from the corresponding action of the good man of society, then, surely, in character, in worth, in spiritual and intelligent estimation, there is the utmost possible diversity

between the two actions. So that, should the most upright and amiable man upon earth embrace the gospel faith, and become the subject of the gospel regeneration,—it is true of him, too, that all old things are done away, and that all things have become new.

Thus it is, that while none of the Christian virtues can be made to come into measurement with any of what may be called the constitutional virtues, in respect of their principle, because the principle of the one set differs from that of the other set, in kind as well as in degree, yet there are certain corresponding virtues in each of the classes, which might be brought together into measurement, in respect of visible and external performance. And it is a high point of obligation with every disciple of the faith, so to sustain his part in this competition, as to show forth the honour of Christianity,—to prove by his own personal history in the world, how much the morality of grace outstrips the morality of nature,—to evince the superior lustre and steadiness of the one, when compared with the frail, and fluctuating, and desultory character of the other,—and to make it clear to the eye of experience, that it is only under the peculiar government of the doctrine of Christ, that all which is amiable in human worth, becomes most lovely, and all which is

justly held in human admiration, becomes most great, and lofty, and venerable. The Bible tells us to provide things honest in the sight of men, as well as of God. It tells us, that upon the person of every Christian, the features of excellence should stand so legibly engraven, that, as a living epistle, he might be seen and read of all men. It is true, there is much in the character of a genuine believer which the world cannot see, and cannot sympathize with. There is the rapture of faith, when in lively exercise. There is the ecstacy of devotion. There is a calm and settled serenity amid all the vicissitudes of life. There is the habit of having no confidence in the flesh, and of rejoicing in the Lord Jesus. There is a holding fast of our hope in the promises of the gospel. There is a cherishing of the Spirit of adoption. There is the work of a believing fellowship with the Father and with the Son. There is a movement of affection towards the things which are above. There is a building up of ourselves on our most holy faith. There is a praying in the Holy Ghost. There is a watching for his influence with all perseverance. In a word, there is all which the Christian knows to be real, and which the world hates, and denounces as visionary, in the secret, but sublime and substantial processes of experimental religion. But, on the other hand, there is also much in

the doings of an altogether Christian, of that palpable virtue which forces itself upon general observation; and he is most grievously untrue to his Master's cause, if he do not, on this ground, so outrun the world, as to force from the men of it, an approving testimony. The eye of the world cannot enter within the spiritual recesses of his heart; but let him ever remember that it is fastened, and that too, with keen and scrutinizing jealousy, on the path of his visible history. It will offer no homage to the mere sanctity of his complexion; nor, unless there be shed over it, the expression of what is mild in domestic, or honourable in public virtue, will it ever look upon him in any other light, than as an object of the most unmingled disgust. And therefore it is, that he must enter on the field of ostensible accomplishment, and there bear away the palm of superiority, and be the most eminent of his fellows in all those recognized virtues, that can bless or embellish the condition of society,—the most untainted in honour, and the most disinterested in justice, and the most alert in beneficence, and the most unwearied in all these graces, under every discouragement and every provocation.

We have now only time to say, that we shall not regret the length of this discourse, or even the recurrence of some of its arguments, if any hearer amongst you, not in the faith, be led by

it, to withdraw his confidence from the mere accomplishments of nature,—and if any believer amongst you be led by it, not to despise these accomplishments, but to put them on, and to animate them all with the spirit of religiousness, —if any hearer amongst you, beginning to perceive his own nothingness in the sight of God, be prompted to enquire, Wherewithal shall I appear before him? and not rest from the enquiry, till he flee from his hiding-place, to that everlasting righteousness which the Saviour hath brought in,—and if any believer amongst you, rightly dividing the word of truth, shall act on the principle, that though nothing but the doctrine of Christ crucified, can avail him for acceptance with God, yet he is bound to adorn this doctrine in all things. And knowing that one may acquiesce in the whole of such a demonstration, without carrying it personally home, we leave off with the single remark, that every conviction not prosecuted, every movement of conscience not followed up, every ray of light or of truth not turned to individual application, will aggravate the reckoning of the great day,—and, that in proportion to the degree of urgency which has been brought to bear upon you, and been resisted, will be the weight and the justness of your final condemnation.

SERMON IX.

THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE TO GOD.



JUDE 21.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God."

It is not easy to give the definition of a term, which is currently and immediately understood without one. But, should not this ready understanding of the term supersede the definition of it? What can we tell of love in the way of explanation, but by a substitution of terms, not more simple and more intelligible than itself? Can this affection of the soul be made clearer to you by words, than it is already clear to you by your own consciousness? Are we to attempt the elucidation of a term, which, without any feeling of darkness or of mystery, you make familiar use of every day? You say with the utmost promptitude, and you have just as

ready an apprehension of the meaning of what you say, that I love this man, and bear a still higher regard to another, but have my chief and my best liking directed to a third. We will not attempt to go in search of a more luminous or expressive term, for this simple affection, than the one that is commonly employed. But it is a different thing, to throw light upon the workings of this affection,—to point your attention to the objects on which it rests, and finds a complacent gratification,—and to assign the circumstances, which are either favourable or unfavourable to its excitement. All this may call forth an exercise of discrimination. But instead of dwelling any more on the significancy of the term love, which is the term of my text, let us forthwith take it unto use, and be confident that, in itself, it carries no ambiguity along with it.

The term love, indeed, admits of a real and intelligent application to inanimate objects. There is a beauty in sights, and a beauty in sounds, and I may bear a positive love to the mute and unconscious individuals in which this beauty hath taken up its residence. I may love a flower, or a murmuring stream, or a sunny bank, or a humble cottage peeping forth from its concealment,—or, in fine, a whole landscape may teem with such varied graces, that I may

say of it, this is the scene I most love to behold, this is the prospect over which my eye and my imagination most fondly expatiate.

The term love admits of an equally real, and equally intelligent application, to our fellow men. They, too, are the frequent and familiar objects of this affection, and they often are so, because they possess certain accomplishments of person and of character, by which it is excited. I love the man, whose every glance speaks an effusive cordiality towards those who are around him. I love the man, whose heart and whose hand are ever open to the representations of distress. I love the man, who possesses such a softness of nature, that the imploring look of a brother in want, or of a brother in pain, disarms him of all his selfishness, and draws him out to some large and willing surrender of generosity. I love the man, who carries on his aspect, not merely the expression of worth, but of worth maintained in the exercise of all its graces, under every variety of temptation and discouragement,—who, in the midst of calumny, can act the warm and enlightened philanthropist,—who, when beset with many provocations, can weather them all in calm and settled endurance,—who can be kind even to the unthankful and the evil,—and who, if he possess the awful virtues of truth and of justice,

only heightens our attachment the more, that he possesses goodness, and tenderness, and benignity along with them.

Now, we would have you to advert to one capital distinction, between the former and the latter class of objects. The inanimate reflect no love upon us back again. They do not single out any one of their admirers, and, by an act of preference, either minister to his selfish appetite for esteem, or minister to his selfish appetite for enjoyment, by affording to him a larger share than to others, of their presence, and of all the delights which their presence inspires. They remain motionless in their places, without will and without sensibility; and the homage they receive, is from the disinterested affection, which men bear to their loveliness. They are loved, and that purely, because they are lovely. There is no mixture of selfishness, in the affection that is offered to them. They do not put on a sweeter smile to one man, than to another; but all the features of that beauty in which they are arrayed, stand inflexibly the same to every beholder,—and he, without any conscious mingling whatever of self-love, in the emotion with which he gazes at the charms of some external scenery, is actuated by a love towards it, which rests and which terminates on the objects that he is employed in contemplating.

But this is not always the case, when our fellow men are the objects of this affection. I should love cordiality, and benevolence, and compassion for their own sakes; but let your own experience tell, how far more sweetly and more intensely the love is felt, when this cordiality is turned, in one stream of kindliness, towards myself,—when the eye of friendship has singled out me, and looks at me with a peculiar graciousness,—when the man of tenderness has pointed his way to the abode of my suffering family, and there shed in secrecy over them his liberalities, and his tears,—when he has forgiven me the debt that I was unable to discharge,—and when, oppressed as I am, by the consciousness of having injured or reviled him, he has nobly forgotten or overlooked the whole provocation, and persists in a regard that knows no abatement, and in a well-doing that is never weary.

There is an element, then, in the love I bear to a fellow man, which does not exist in the love I bear to an inanimate object; and which may serve, perhaps, to darken the character of the affection that I feel towards the former. We most readily concede it, that the love of another, on account of the virtues which adorn him, changes its moral character altogether, if it be a love to him, solely on account of the

benefit which I derive from the exercise of these virtues. I should love compassion on its own account, as well as on the account that it is I who have been the object of it. I should love justice on its own account, as well as on the account that my grievances have been redressed by the dispensation of it. On looking at goodness, I should feel an affection resting on this object, and finding there its full and its terminating gratification; and that, though I had never stood in the way of any one of its beneficent operations.

How is it then, that the special direction of a moral virtue in another, towards the object of my personal benefit, operates in enhancing both the sensation which it imparts to my heart, and the estimate which I form of it? What is the peculiar quality communicated to my admiration of another's friendship, and another's goodness, by the circumstance of myself being the individual, towards whom that friendship is cherished, and in favour of whom, that goodness puts itself forth into active exertion? At the sight of a benevolent man, there arises in my bosom an instantaneous homage of regard and of reverence;—but should that homage take a pointed direction towards myself,—should it realize its fruits on the comfort and security of my own person,—should it be em-

ployed in gladdening my home, and spreading enjoyment over my family, oppressed with want, and pining in sickness, there is, you will allow, by these circumstances, a heightening of the love and the admiration, that I formerly rendered to him. And, we should like to know what is the precise character of the addition, that has thus been given, to my regard for the virtue of benevolence. We should like to know, if it be altogether a pure and a praiseworthy accession, that has thus come upon the sentiment with which I now look at my benefactor,—or, if, by contracting any taint of selfishness, it has lost the high rank that formerly belonged to it, as a disinterested affection, towards the goodness which beautifies and adorns his character.

There is one way, however, in which this special direction of a moral virtue towards my particular interest, may increase my affection for it, and without changing the moral character of my affection. It gives me a nearer view of the virtue in question. It is true, that the virtue may just be as lovely when exercised in behalf of my neighbour, as when exercised in behalf of myself. But, in the former case, I am not an eye-witness to the display and the evolution of its loveliness. I am a limited being, who cannot take in so full and so distinct an impression of the character of what is distant,

as of the character of what is immediately beside me. It is true, that all the circumstances may be reported. But you know very well, that a much livelier representation is obtained of any object, by the seeing of it, than by the hearing of it. To be told of kindness, does not bring this attribute of character so forcibly, or so clearly home to my observation, as to receive a visit from kindness, and to take it by the hand, and to see its benignant mien, and to hear its gentle and complacent voice, and to witness the solicitude of its inquiries, and to behold its tender and honest anxiety for my interest, and to share daily and weekly in the liberalities which it has bestowed upon me. When all this goes on around my own person, and within the limits of my own dwelling-place, it is very true that self is gratified, and that this circumstance may give rise to sensations, which are altogether distinct from the love I bear to moral worth, or to moral excellence. But this does not hinder, that, along with these sensations, a disinterested love for the moral virtue of which I have been the object, may, at the same time, have its room, and its residence within my bosom. I may love goodness more than ever, on its own account, since it has taken its specific way to my habitation, and that, just because I have obtained a nearer acquaintance with it.

I may love it better, because I know it better. My affection for it may have become more intense, and more devoted than before, because its beauty is now more fully unfolded to the eye of my observation than before.—And thus, while we admit that the goodness of which I am the object, originates within me certain feelings, different in kind from that which is excited by goodness in the general, yet it may heighten the degree of this latter feeling also. It may kindle or augment the love I bear to moral virtue in itself; or, in other words, it may enhance my affection for worth, without any change whatever in the moral character of that affection.

Now, before we proceed to consider those peculiar emotions which are excited within me, by being the individual, in whose favour certain virtues are exercised, and which emotions, are, all of them, different in kind from the affection that I bear for these virtues,—let us farther observe, that the term love, when applied to a sentient being, considered as the object of it, may denote an affection, different in the principle of its excitement, from any that we have been yet considering. My love to another may lie in the liking I have for the moral qualities which belong to him; and this, by way of distinctness, may be called the love of moral esteem or approbation. Or, my love to another,

may consist in the desire I have for his happiness; and this may be called the love of kindness. These two are often allied to each other in fact, but there is a real difference in their nature. The love of kindness which I bear to my infant child, may have no reference to its moral qualities whatever. This love finds its terminating gratification, in obtaining for the object of it, exemption from pain, or in ministering to its enjoyments. It is very true, that the sight of what is odious or revolting in the character of another, tends, in point of fact, to dissipate all the love of kindness I may have ever borne to him. But it does not always do so, and one instance of this proves a real distinction, in point of nature, between the love of kindness, and the love of moral esteem. And the highest and most affecting instance which can be given of this distinction, is in the love wherewith God hath loved the world,—is in that kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus, which he hath made known to men in the gospel,—is in that longing regard to his fallen creatures, whereby he was not willing that any should perish, but rather that all should live. There was the love of kindness standing out, in marked and separate display, from the love of moral esteem; for, alas! in the degraded race of mankind, there was not one quality, which

could call forth such an affection, in the breast of the Godhead. It was, when we were hateful to him in character, that, in person and in interest, we were the objects of his most unbounded tenderness. It was, when we were enemies by wicked works, that God looked on with pity, and stretched forth, to his guilty children, the arms of offered reconciliation. It was, when we had wandered far in the paths of worthlessness and alienation, that he devised a message of love, and sent his Son into our world, to seek and to save us.

And this, by the way, may serve to illustrate the kind of love, which we are required to bear to our enemies. We are required to love them, in the same way in which God loves his enemies. A conscientious man will feel oppressed by the difficulty of such a precept, if he try to put it into obedience, by loving those who have offended, with the same feeling of complacency with which he loves those who have befriended him. But the truth is, that the love of moral esteem often enters, as a principal ingredient, into the love of complacency; and we are not required, by our imitation of the Godhead, to entertain any such affection, for the depraved and the worthless. It is enough, that we cherish towards them in our hearts the love of kindness; and this will be felt a far more practicable

achievement, than to force up the love of complacency into a bosom, revolted by the aspect of treachery, or dishonesty, or unprincipled selfishness. There is no possible motive to excite the latter affection. There may be a thousand to excite the former,—and we have only to look to the unhappy man in all his prospects, and in all his relations,—we have only to pity his delusions, and to view him as the hapless victim of a sad and ruinous infatuation,—we have only to carry our eye onwards to the agonies of that death, which will shortly lay hold of him, and to compute the horrors of that eternity, which if not recovered from the error of his way, he is about to enter,—we have only, in a word, to put forth an exercise of faith in certain near and impending realities, the evidence of which is altogether resistless, in order to summon up such motives, and such considerations, as may cause the compassion of our nature to predominate over the resentment of our nature,—and as will assure to a believer, the victory over such urgencies of his constitution, as, to the unrenewed heart, are utterly unconquerable.

But to resume our argument, let it be observed, that the kindness of God is one of the loveliest, and most estimable of the attributes which belong to him. It is a bright feature in

that assemblage of excellencies which enter into the character of the Godhead; and, as such, independently altogether of this kindness being exercised upon me, I should offer to it the homage of my moral approbation. But, should I be the special and the signalized object of his kindness, there is another sentiment toward God, beside the love of moral esteem, that ought to be formed within me by that circumstance, and which, in the business of reasoning, should be kept apart from it. There is the love of gratitude. These often go together, and may be felt simultaneously, towards the one being we are employed in contemplating. But they are just as distinct, each from the other, as is the love of moral esteem from the love of kindness. We trust that we have already convinced you, that God feels towards us, his inferiors, the love of kindness, when he cannot, from the nature of the object, feel for us the slightest degree of the love of moral esteem. In the same manner, may we feel, we are not saying towards God, but towards an earthly benefactor, the love of gratitude, when, from the nature of the object we are employed in contemplating, there is much to impair within us the love of moral esteem, or to extinguish it altogether. Is it not most natural to say of the man, who has been personally benevolent

to myself, and who has, at the same time, disgraced himself by his vices, that, bad as he is, he has been at all times remarkably kind to me, and felt many a movement of friendship towards my person, and done many a deed of important service to my family, and that I, at least, owe him a gratitude for all this,—that I, at least, should be longer than others, of dismissing from my bosom the last remainder of cordiality towards him,—that, if infamy and poverty have followed in the career of his wickedness, and he have become an outcast from the attentions of other men, it is not for me to spurn him instantly from my door,—or, in the face of my particular recollections, to look unpitying and unmoved, at the wretchedness into which he has fallen?

It is the more necessary, to distinguish the love of gratitude from the love of moral esteem, that each of these affections may be excited simultaneously within me, by one act or by one exhibition of himself, on the part of the Deity. Let me be made to understand, that God has passed by my transgression, and generously admitted me into the privileges and the rewards of obedience,—I see in this, a tenderness, and a mercy, and a love, for his creatures, which, if blended at the same time with all that is high and honourable in the more august attributes

of his nature, have the effect of presenting him to my mind, and of drawing out my heart in moral regard to him, as a most amiable and estimable object of contemplation. But, besides this, there is a peculiar love of gratitude, excited by the consideration that I am the object of this benignity,—that I am one of the creatures to whom he has directed this peculiar regard,—that he has singled out me, and conceived a gracious purpose towards me, and in the execution of this purpose, is lavishing upon my person, the blessings of a father's care, and a father's tenderness. Both the love of moral esteem, and the love of gratitude, may thus be in contemporaneous operation within me; and it will be seen to accomplish a practical as well as a metaphysical purpose, to keep the one apart from the other, in the view of the mind, when love towards God is the topic of speculation which engages it.

But, farther, let it be understood, that the love of gratitude differs from the love of moral esteem, not merely in the cause which immediately originates it, but also in the object, in which it finds its rest and its gratification. It is the kindness of another being to myself, which originates within me the love of gratitude towards him; and it is the view of what is morally estimable in this being, that originates

within me all the love of moral esteem, that I entertain for him. There is a real distinction of cause between these two affections, and there is also between them a real distinction of object. The love of moral esteem finds its complacent gratification, in the act of dwelling contemplatively on that being, by whom it is excited,—just as a tasteful enthusiast inhales delight from the act of gazing, on the charms of some external scenery. The pleasure he receives, emanates directly upon his mind, from the forms of beauty and of loveliness which are around him. And if, instead of a taste for the beauties of nature, there exists within him, a taste for the beauties of holiness, then will he love the being, who presents to the eye of his contemplation the fullest assemblage of them, and his taste will find its complacent gratification in dwelling upon him, whether as an object of thought, or as an object of perception. "One thing have I desired," says the Psalmist, "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Now, the love of gratitude is distinct from this in its object. It is excited by the love of kindness; and the feeling which is thus excited, is just a feeling of kindness back again. It is kindness begetting kindness. The language of this affection is, "What shall I ren-

der unto the Lord for all his benefits?" He has done what is pleasing, and gratifying to me. What shall I do to please, and to gratify him? The love of gratitude seeks for answers to this question, and finds its delight in acting upon them, and whether the answer be,—this is the will of God, even your sanctification,—or, with the sacrifices of liberality God is well pleased,—or, obedience to parents is well-pleasing in his sight,—these all point out so many lines of conduct, to which the impulse of the love of gratitude would carry us, and attest this to be the love of God,—that ye keep his commandments.

And, indeed, when the same being combines, in his own person, that which ought to excite the love of moral esteem, with that which ought to excite the love of gratitude,—the two ingredients, enter with a mingled but harmonious concurrence, into the exercise of one compound affection. It is true, that the more appropriate offering of the former is the offering of praise,—just as when one looks to the beauties of nature, he breaks out into a rapturous acknowledgment of them; and so it may be, when one looks to the venerable, and the lovely in the character of God. The more appropriate offering of the latter, is the offering of thanksgiving, [illegible] such services as are fitted to please, and to gratify a benefactor. But still it may be

observed,—how each of these simple affections tends to express itself, by the very act which more characteristically marks the workings of the other; or, how the more appropriate offering of the first of them, may be prompted under the impulse and movement of the second of them, and conversely. For, if I love God because of his perfections, what principle can more powerfully or more directly lead to the imitation of them?—which is the very service that he requires, and the very offering that he is most pleased with. And, if I love God because of his goodness to me, what is more fitted to prompt my every exertion, in the way of spreading the honours of his character and of his name among my fellows,—and, for this purpose, to magnify in their hearing the glories and the attributes of his nature? It is thus that the voice of praise and the voice of gratitude may enter into one song of adoration; and that whilst the Psalmist, at one time, gives thanks to God at the remembrance of his holiness, he, at another, pours forth praise at the remembrance of his mercies.

To have the love of gratitude towards God, it is essential that we know and believe his love of kindness towards us. To have the love of moral esteem towards him, it is essential that the loveliness of his character be in the eye of

the mind; or, in other words, that the mind keep itself, in steady and believing contemplation of the excellencies which belong to him. The view that we have of God, is just as much in the order of precedency to the affection that we entertain for him, as any two successive steps can be, in any of the processes of our mental constitution. To obtain the introduction of love into the heart, there must, as a preparatory circumstance, be the introduction of knowledge into the understanding; or, as we can never be said to know what we do not believe—ere we have love, we must have faith; and, accordingly, in the passage from which our text is extracted, do we perceive the one pointed to, as the instrument for the production of the other. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, building yourselves up on your most holy faith."

And here, it ought to be remarked, that a man may experience a mental process, and yet have no taste or no understanding for the explanation of it. The simple truths of the gospel, may enter with acceptance into the mind of a peasant, and there work all the proper influences on his heart and character, which the Bible ascribes to them; and yet he may be utterly incapable of tracing that series of inward movements, by which he is carried onwards from a belief in the truth, to all those moral and

affectionate regards, which mark a genuine disciple of the truth. He may be the actual subject of these movements, though altogether unable to follow or to analyze them. This is not peculiar to the judgments, or the feelings of Christianity. In the matters of ordinary life, a man may judge sagaciously, and feel correctly while ardently;—and experience, in right and natural order, the play of his various faculties, without having it at all in his power, either to frame or to follow a true theory of his faculties. It is well, that the simple preaching of the gospel has its right practical operation on men, who make no attempt whatever, to comprehend the metaphysics of the operation. But, if ever metaphysics be employed to darken the freeness of the gospel offer, or to dethrone faith from the supremacy which belongs to it, or to forbid the approaches of those whom God has not forbidden; then must it be met upon its own ground, and the real character of our beneficent religion be asserted, amid the attempts of those who have in any way obscured or injured it by their illustrations.

SERMON X.

GRATITUDE, NOT A SORDID AFFECTION.



1 John iv. 19.

"We love him, because he first loved us."

Some theologians have exacted from an inquirer, at the very outset of his conversion, that he should carry in his heart what they call the disinterested love of God. They have set him on the most painful efforts to acquire this affection,—and that too, before he was in circumstances in which it was at all possible to entertain it. They have led him to view with suspicion the love of gratitude, as having in it a taint of selfishness. They are for having him to love God, and that on the single ground that he is lovely, without any reference to his own comfort, or even to his own safety. Strange demand which they make on a sentient being,

that even amidst the fears and the images of destruction, he should find room in his heart for the love of complacency! and equally strange demand to make on a sinful being, that ere he admit such a sense of reconciliation into his bosom, as will instantly call forth a grateful regard to him who has conferred it, he must view God with a disinterested affection; that from the deep and helpless abyss of his depravity, he must find, unaided, his ascending way to the purest and the sublimest emotion of moral nature; that ere he is delivered from fear he must love, even though it be said of love that it casteth out fear; and that ere he is placed on the vantage ground of the peace of the gospel, he must realize on his character, one of the most exalted of its perfections.

The effect of all this on many an anxious seeker after rest, has been most discouraging. With the stigma that has been affixed to the love of gratitude, they have been positively apprehensive of the inroads of this affection, and have studiously averted the eye of their contemplation, from the objects which are fitted to inspire it. In other words, they have hesitated to entertain the free offers of salvation, and misinterpreted all the tokens of an embassy, which has proclaimed peace on earth and good will to men. They think that all which they

can possibly gather, in the way of affection, from such a contemplation, is the love of gratitude; and that gratitude is selfishness; and that selfishness is not a gracious affection; and that ere they be surely and soundly converted, the love they bear to God must be of a totally disinterested character; and thus, through another medium than that of a free and gratuitous dispensation of kindness, do they strive, by a misunderstood gospel, or without the gospel altogether, to reach a peace and a preparation, which we fear, in their way of it, is to sinners utterly unattainable.

In the progress of this discourse let us endeavour, in the first place, to rescue the love of gratitude from the imputations which have been preferred against it,—and, secondly, to assign to the love of kindness manifested to the world in the gospel, and to the faith by which that love is made to arise in the heart, the place and the pre-eminence which belong to them.

I. The proper object of the love of gratitude, is the being, who has exercised towards me the love of kindness; and this is more correct than to say, that the proper object of this affection, is the being who has conferred benefits upon me. I can conceive another to load me with benefactions, and at the same time, to evince that

kindness towards me was not the principle which impelled him. It may be done reluctantly at the bidding of another, or it may be done to serve some interested purpose, or it may be done to parade his generosity before the eye of the public. If it be not done from a real principle of kindness to myself, I may take his gifts, and I may find enjoyment in the use of them; but I feel no gratitude towards the dispenser of them. Unless I see his kindness in them, I will not be grateful. It is true that, in point of fact, gratitude often springs from the rendering of a benefit; but, lest we should confound things which are different, let it be well observed, that this is only when the benefit serves as the indication of a kind purpose, or of a kind affection, on the part of him who hath granted it. And this may be proved, not merely by showing, that there may be no gratitude where there is a benefit, but also by showing, that there may be gratitude where there is no material benefit whatever. Just let the naked principle of kindness discover itself, and though it have neither the power, nor the opportunity, of coming forth with the dispensation of any service, it is striking to observe, how upon the bare existence of this affection being known, it is met by a grateful feeling, on the part of him to whom it is directed; and

what mighty augmentations may be given, in this way, to the stock of enjoyment, and that, by the mere reciprocation of kindness begetting kindness. For, to send the expression of this kindness into another's bosom, it is not always necessary to do it on the vehicle of a positive donation. It may be conveyed by a look of benevolence; and thus it is, that by the mere feeling of cordiality, a tide of happiness may be made to circulate throughout all the individuals of an assembled company. Or it may be done by a very slight and passing attention, and thus it is, that the cheap services of courteousness, may spread such a charm over the face of a neighbourhood. Or it may be done by the very poorest member of human society,—and thus it is, that the ready and sincere homage of attachment from such a man, may beam a truer felicity upon me, and call forth a livelier gratitude to him who has conferred it, than some splendid act of patronage on the part of a superior. Or it may be done by a Christian visitor in some of the humblest of our city lanes, who, without one penny to bestow on the children of want, may spread among them the simple conviction of her good will, and call down upon her person, the voice of thankfulness and of blessing from all their habitations. And thus it is, that by good will creating good will,

a pure and gladdening influence will at length go abroad over the face of our world, and mankind will be made to know the might and the mystery of that tie, which is to bind them together into one family, and they will rejoice in the power of that secret charm which so heightens and so multiplies the pleasure of all the members of it; and, when transported from earth to heaven, they will still feel, that while it is to the benefits which God hath conferred, that they owe the possession and all the privileges of existence,—it is to a sense of the love which prompted these benefits, that they will owe the extatic charm of their immortality. It is the beaming kindness of God upon them, that will put their souls into the liveliest transports of gratitude and joy: and it is the reciprocation of this kindness on the part of those, who while they have fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, have fellowship also with one another, that will cause the joy of heaven to be full.

The distinction which we are now adverting to, is something more, than a mere shadowy refinement of speculation. It may be realized on the most trodden and ordinary path of human experience, and is, in fact, one of the most familiar exhibitions of genuine and unsophisticated nature, in those ranks of society where re-

finement is unknown. Let one man go over any given district of the city, fully fraught with the *materiel* of benevolence,—let him be the agent of some munificent subscription, and with nothing in his heart but just such affections, and such jealousies, and such thoughtful anxieties, about a right and equitable division, as belong to the general spirit of his office,—let him leave some substantial deposit with each of the families; and then compute, if he can, the quantity of gratitude which he carries away with him. It were a most unkind reflection on the lower orders, and not more unkind than untrue, to deny that there will be the mingling of some gratitude, along with the clamour, and the envy, and the discontent, which are ever sure to follow in the train of such a ministration. It is not to discredit the poor, that we introduce our present observation,—but to bring out, if possible, into broad and luminous exhibition, one of the finest sensibilities which adorns them. It is to let you know the high cast of character of which they are capable,—and how the glow of pleasure which arises in their bosoms, when the eye of simple affection beams upon their persons, or upon their habitations, may not have one single taint of sordidness to debase it. And to prove this, just let another man go over the same district, and in the train of the former

visitation—conceive him unbacked by any public institution, to have nothing in his hand that might not be absorbed by the needs of a single family, but, that utterly destitute, as he is, of the *materiel,* he has a heart charged and overflowing with the whole *morale* of benevolence. Just let him go forth among the people, without one other recommendation than an honest and undissembled good will to them,—and let this good will manifest its existence, in any one of the thousand ways, by which it may be authenticated,—and whether it be by the cordiality of his manners, or by his sympathy with their griefs, or by the nameless attentions and offices of civility, or by the higher aim of that kindness which points to the welfare of their immortality, and evinces its reality, by its ready and unwearied services among the young, or the sick, or the dying,—just let them be satisfied of the one fact, that he is their friend, and that all their joys and all their sorrows are his own,—he may be struggling with hardships and necessities, as the poorest of them all,—but poor as they are, they know what is in his heart, and well do they know how to value it;—and from the voice of welcome, which meets him in the very humblest of their tenements,—and from the smile of that heartfelt enjoyment, which his presence is ever sure to awaken, and

from the influence of graciousness which he carries along with him into every house, and by which he lights up an honest emotion of thankfulness in the bosom of every family, may we gather the existence of a power, which worth alone, and without the accompaniment of wealth, can bestow,—a power to sweeten and subdue, and tranquillize, which no money can purchase, which no patronage can create.

It will be readily acknowledged by all, that the most precious object in the management of a town, is to establish the reign of happiness and contentment among those who live in it. And it is interesting to mark the operations of those, who, without adverting to the principle that I now insist upon, think, that all is to be achieved, by the beggarly elements which enter into the arithmetic of ordinary business,—who rear their goodly scheme upon the basis of sums and computations,—and think that by an overwhelming discharge of the *materiel* of benevolence, they will reach an accomplishment, which the *morale* of benevolence alone is equal to. We are sure that it is not to mortify our men of grave, and official, and calculating experience, that we tell them, how, with all their strength, and all their sagacity, they have only given their money for that which is not meat, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.

It is to illustrate a principle of our common nature, so obvious, that to be recognised, it needs only to be spoken of. And it were well, if in so doing, their thoughts could be led to the instrumentality of this principle, as the only way, in which they can redeem the failures of there bygone experience;—if they could be convinced, that the agents of a zealous and affectionate Christianity, can alone do, what all the influence of municipal weight, and municipal wisdom cannot do;—if they could be taught what the ministrations are, by which a pure and a responding gratitude, may be made to circulate throughout all our dwelling-places;—if, in a word, while they profess to serve the poor, they could be led to respect the poor, to do homage to that fineness of moral temperament which belongs to them, and which hitherto seems to have escaped, altogether, the eye of civil or political superintendence,—and they may rest assured, that let them give as much in the shape of munificence as they will, if they add not the love to the liberality of the gospel, they will never soften one feature of unkindliness, or chase away one exasperated feeling, from the hearts of a neglected population.

But, beside the degree of purity in which this principle may exist among the most destitute of our species, it is also of importance to remark

the degree of strength, in which it actually exists among the most depraved of our species. And, on this subject, do we think that the venerable HOWARD has bequeathed to us a most striking and valuable observation. You know the history of this man's enterprises; how his doings, and his observations, were among the veriest outcasts of humanity,—how he descended into prison houses, and there made himself familiar with all that could most revolt, or terrify, in the exhibition of our fallen nature;—how, for this purpose, he made the tour of Europe; but instead of walking in the footsteps of other travellers, he toiled his painful and persevering way through these receptacles of worthlessness;—and, sound experimentalist as he was, did he treasure up the phenomena of our nature, throughout all the stages of misfortune, or depravity. We may well conceive the scenes of moral desolation that would often meet his eye; and that, as he looked to the hard, and dauntless, and defying aspect of criminality before him, he would sicken in despair of ever finding one remnant of a purer and better principle, by which he might lay hold of these unhappy men, and convert them into the willing and the consenting agents of their own amelioration. And yet such a principle he found, and found it, as he tells us, after years

of intercourse, as the fruit of his greater experience, and his longer observation; and gives, as the result of it, that convicts, and that, among the most desperate of them all, are not ungovernable, and that there is a way of managing even them, and that the way is, without relaxing, in one iota, from the steadiness of a calm and resolute discipline, to treat them with tenderness, and to show them that you have humanity; and thus a principle, of itself so beautiful, that to expatiate upon it, gives in the eyes of some, an air of fantastic declamation to our argument, is actually deponed to, by an aged and most sagacious observer. It is the very principle of our text; and it would appear that it keeps a lingering hold of our nature, even in the last and lowest degree of human wickedness; and that, when abandoned by every other principle, this may still be detected,—that even among the most hackneyed and most hardened of malefactors there is still about them a softer part which will give way to the demonstrations of tenderness,—that this one ingredient of a better character is still found to survive the dissipation of all the others,—that, fallen as a brother may be, from the moralities which at one time adorned him, the manifested good will of his fellow man still carries a charm and an influence along with it; and, that, therefore, there

lies in this, an operation which, as no poverty can vitiate, so no depravity can extinguish.*

Now, this is the very principle which is brought into action, in the dealings of God with a whole world of malefactors. It looks, as if he confided the whole cause of our recovery, to the influence of a demonstration of good-will. It is truly interesting to mark, what, in the devisings of his unsearchable wisdom, is the character which he has made to stand most visibly out, in the great scheme and history of our redemption: and surely if there be one feature of prominency more visible than another, it is the love of kindness. There appears to be no other possible way, by which a responding affection can be deposited in the heart of man. Certain it is, that the law of love cannot be carried to its ascendency over us by storm. Authority cannot command it. Strength cannot implant it. Terror cannot charm it into existence. The threatenings of vengeance may stifle, or they may repel, but they never can woo this delicate principle of our nature, into a warm and confiding attachment. The human heart remains shut, in all its receptacles, against the force of these various applications; and

* The operation of the same principle has, of late, been strikingly exemplified by Mrs. Fry, and her coadjutors, in the prison at Newgate.

God, who knew what was in man, seems to have known, that in his dark and guilty bosom, there was but one solitary hold that he had over him; and that to reach it, he must just put on a look of graciousness, and tell us that he has no pleasure in our death, and manifest towards us the longings of a bereaved parent, and even humble himself to a suppliant in the cause of our return, and send a gospel of peace into the world, and bid his messengers to bear throughout all its habitations, the tidings of his good will to the children of men. This is the topic of his most anxious and repeated demonstration. This manifested good will of God to his creatures, is the band of love, and the cord of a man, by which he draws them. It is true, that from the inaccessible throne of his glory, we see no direct emanation of his tenderness upon us, from the face of the King who is invisible. But, as if to make up for this, he sent his Son into the world, and declared him to be God manifest in the flesh, and let us see, in his tears, and in his sympathies, and in all the recorded traits of his kindness, and gentleness, and love, what a God we have to deal with. It is true, that even in love to us, he did not let down one attribute of truth or of majesty which belonged to him. But, in love to us, he hath laid upon his own Son the burden of their vindication;—

and now, that every obstacle is done away; now, that the barrier which lay across the path of acceptance, is levelled by the power of him who travailled in the greatness of his strength for us; now, that the blood of atonement has been shed, and that the justice of God has been magnified, and that our iniquities have been placed on the great Sacrifice, and so borne away that there is no more mention of them; now, that with his dignity entire, and his holiness untainted, the door of heaven may be opened, and sinners be called upon to enter in, —is the voice of a friendly and beseeching God, lifted up without reserve, in the hearing of us all;—his love of kindness is published abroad among men;—and this one mighty principle of attraction is brought to bear upon a nature, that might have remained sullen and unmoved under every other application.

And, as God, in the measure of restoring a degenerate world unto himself, hath set in operation the very same principle as that which we have attempted to illustrate,—so the operation hath produced the very same result that we have ascribed to it. As soon as his love of kindness is believed, so soon does the love of gratitude spring up in the heart of the believer. As soon as man gives up his fear and his suspicion of God, and discerns him to be his friend,

so soon does he render him the homage of a willing and affectionate loyalty. There is not a man who can say, I have known and believed the love which God hath to us, who cannot say also, I have loved God because he first loved me. There has not, we will venture to affirm, been a single example in the whole history of the church, of a man who had a real faith in the overtures of peace and of tenderness which are proposed by the gospel, and who did not, at the same time, exemplify this attribute of the Christian faith, that it worketh by love. It is thus that the faith which recognises God, as God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, lies at the turning point of conversion. In this way, and in this way alone, is there an inlet of communication open to the heart of man, for that principle of love to God, which gives all its power and all its character to the new obedience of the gospel. So soon as a man really knows the truth, and no man can be said to know what he does not believe, will this truth enthrone a new affection in his bosom, which will set him free from the dominion of all such affections as are earthly and rebellious. The whole style and spirit of his obedience are transformed. The man now walks with the vigour, and the confidence, and the enlargement, of one who is set at liberty. It looks a mysterious revolution

in the general eye of the world. But the fact is, that from the moment a sinner closes with the overtures of the gospel, from that moment a new era is established in the history of his mind altogether. As soon as he sees what he never saw before, so soon does he feel what he never felt before. Without the faith of the gospel he may serve God in the spirit of bondage; he may be driven, by the terrors of his law, into many outward and reluctant conformities; he may even, without the influence of these terrors, maintain a thousand decencies of taste, and custom, and established observation. But he is still an utter stranger to the first and the greatest commandment. There may be the homage of many a visible movement with the body, while, in the whole bent and disposition of the soul, there is nothing but aversion, and distance, and enmity. Even the word of the gospel may be addressed, Sabbath after Sabbath, and that too, to hearers who offer no positive resistance to it,—but coming to them only in word, they remain as motionless and unimpressed as ever, and with an utter dormancy in their hearts, as to any responding movement of gratitude. The heart, in fact, remains unapproachable in every other way, but by the gospel coming to it, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much

assurance. Then is it, that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts; and that the gospel approves itself to be his power, and his wisdom, to the sanctification of all who believe in it.

Now, the theologians to whom we allude, have set up obstacles in the way of such a process. They hold a language about the disinterested love of God, and demand this at the very outset of a man's conversion, in such a way, as may retard his entrance upon a life of faith,—as may have prolonged the darkness of many an inquirer, and have kept him in a state of despair, whom a right understanding of the gospel would have relieved of all his doubts, and all his perplexities. They seem to look on the love of gratitude, as having in it a taint of selfishness. They say, that to love a being, because he is my benefactor, is little better than to love the benefit which he has conferred upon me; and that this, instead of any evidence of a state of grace, is the mere effect of an appetite which belongs essentially and universally to the animal state of nature. They appear to have missed the distinction, between the love that is felt towards the benefit itself, and the love of gratitude that is felt towards the author of it; though certainly there are here two objects of affection altogether distinct from each other. My liking for the gift is a different phase of

mind from my liking for the giver. In the one exercise, I am looking to a different object, and my thoughts have a different employment, from what they have in the other. Had I an affection for the gift, without an affection for the giver, then might I evince an unmixed selfishness of character. But I may have both; and my affection for the giver may be purely in obedience to that law of reciprocity, whereby if another likes me, I am disposed by that circumstance, and by that alone, to like him back again. The gift may serve merely the purpose of an indication. It is the medium, through which I perceive the love that another bears me. But it is possible for me to perceive this through another medium, and, in this case, the rising gratitude of my bosom might look a purer and more disinterested emotion. But the truth is, that it retains the very same character, though a gift has been the occasion of its excitement,—and, therefore, it ought not to have been so assimilated to the principle of selfishness. It ought not to have been so discouraged, and made the object of suspicion, at that moment of its evolution, when the returning sinner looks by faith to the truths and the promises of the gospel, and sees in them the tenderness of an inviting God. It ought not to have been so stigmatized, as a mere portion of his unrenewed

nature; for, in truth, it will heighten and grow upon him, with every step in the advancement of his moral renovation. It will be one of the gracefullest of his accomplishments in this world; and so far from being extinguished in the next, along with the baser and more selfish affections of our constitution, it will pour an animating spirit into many a song of ecstacy, to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. The law of love begetting love, will obtain in eternity. Like the law of reciprocal attraction in the material world, it will cement the immutable and everlasting order of that moral system, which is to emerge with the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The love which emanates from the throne of God, upon his surrounding family, will call back a voice of blessing, and thanksgiving, and glory, from all the members of it. And the love which his children bear to each other, will, in like manner, be reflected and multiplied. All that is wrong in selfishness will be there unknown. But gratitude, so far from being counted an unseemly companion for paradise,—will be one chief ingredient in the fulness of its joy,—one of the purest and most exquisite of those pleasures, which are for evermore.

The first consideration then, upon which we

would elevate gratitude to the rank of a virtue, is, that in its object, it is altogether distinct from selfishness. It is enough, indeed, to dissolve the imagination of any kindred character between selfishness and gratitude, that the man without selfishness, seems to the eye of a beholder, as standing on a lofty eminence of virtue:—the man without gratitude, is held, by all, to be a monster of deformity. Give me a man who seizes with ravenous appropriation all that I have to bestow,—and who hoards it, or feeds upon it, or, in any way rejoices over it, without one grateful movement of his heart towards me,—and you lay before me a character, not merely unlike, but diametrically opposite, to the character of him who obtains the very same gift, and perhaps, derives from the use of it, an equal, or a greater degree of enjoyment, to the sensitive part of his nature,—but who, in addition to all this, has thought, and affection, and the higher principles of his nature, excited by the consideration of the giver; and looks to the manifested love that appears in this act of generosity; and is touched with love back again; and, under the influence of this responding affection, conceives the kindest wishes, and pours out the warmest prayers, for the interest of his benefactor, and shows him all the symptoms of friendship, and surrounds him with all its services.

The second consideration, upon which we would elevate gratitude to the rank of a pure virtue, has already been glanced at. Were it not a virtue, it would have no place in heaven. Did it only appertain to the unrenewed part of our nature, it would find no admittance among the saints in paradise. But one of the songs of the redeemed, is a song of gratitude.

And, thirdly, by looking more closely to this affection, both in its origin and in its exercises, we shall perceive in it, more clearly, all the characteristics of virtue.

Let it be remarked then, that an affection may simply exist, and yet be no evidence of any virtue, or of any moral worth, in the holder of it. I may look on a beautiful prospect, and be drawn out to an involuntary sentiment of admiration. Or, I may look on my infant child, and, without one effort of volition, feel a parental tenderness towards it. Or, I may be present at a scene of distress, and without choosing or willing it to be so, I may be moved to the softest compassion. And, in this way, I may have a character made up of many affections, some of which are tasteful, some of which are most amiable in themselves, and some of which are most useful to society: and yet, none of which may possess the smallest portion of the essential character of virtue. They may be brought into

exercise, without any working of a sense of duty whatever. One of those we have specified —the instinctive affection of parents for their young—is exemplified in all its strength, and in all its tenderness, by the inferior animals. And, therefore, if we want to know what that is which constitutes the character of virtue, or moral worth, in a human being, we must look to something else, than to the mere existence of certain affections, however valuable they may prove to others, or whatever gracefulness they may shed over the complexion of him who possesses them.

Now, it would be raising a collateral into a main topic, were we to enter upon a full explanation of the matter that has now been suggested. And we shall, therefore, briefly remark, that to give the character of virtue to any grace of the inner man, the will, acting under a sense of duty, must, in some way or other, have been concerned, in the establishment, or, in the continuance of it; and that to give the same character of virtue to a deed of the outer man, the will must also be concerned. A deed is only virtuous in so far as it is voluntary; and it is only in proportion to the share which the will has in the performance of it, and the will impelling us to do, what we are persuaded ought to be done, that there can be awarded to the

deed in question, any character of moral estimation.

This will explain what the circumstances are, under which the gratitude of a human being may at one time be an instinct, and at another time a virtue. I may enter the house of an individual who is an utter stranger to the habit of acting under a sense of duty; who is just as much the creature of mere impulse, as the animals beneath him; and who, therefore, though some of these impulses are more characteristic of his condition as a man, and most subservient to the good of his fellows, may be considered as possessing no virtue whatever, in the strict and proper sense of the term. But he has the property of being affected by external causes. And I, by some ministration of friendship, may flash upon his mind such an overpowering conviction of the good-will that I bear him, as to affect him with a sense of gratitude, even unto tears. The moral obligation of gratitude may not be present to his mind at all. But the emotion of gratitude comes into his heart unbidden, and finds its vent in acknowledgments, and blessings, on the person of his benefactor. We would say, of such a person, that he possesses a happier original constitution than another, who, in the same circumstances, would not be so powerfully or so tenderly affected.

And yet he may have hitherto evinced nothing more than the workings of a mere instinct, which springs spontaneously within him, and gives its own impulse to his words and his performances, without a sense of duty having any share in the matter, or without the will prompting the individual by any such consideration, as, Let me do this thing because I ought to do it.

Let us now conceive the moral sense to be admitted to its share of influence over this proceeding. Let it be consulted on the question of what ought to be felt, and what ought to be done, by one being, when another evinces the love of kindness towards him. A mere instinct may, in point of fact, draw out a return of love and of service back again. But it is the province of the moral sense to pronounce on the point of obligation, and we speak its universal suggestion, when we say, that the love of gratitude ought to be felt, and the services of gratitude ought to be rendered.

Now, to make this decision of the moral sense practically effectual, and, indeed, to make the moral sense have any thing to do with this question at all, the feeling of gratitude must, in some way or other, be dependent either for its existence, or its growth, or its continuance, upon the will; and the same will must also have a command over the services of gratitude.

The moral sense, in fact, never interposes with any dictate, or with any declaration about the feelings, or the conduct of man, unless in so far as the will of man has an influence, and a power of regulation over them. It never makes the rate of the circulation of the blood a question of duty, because this is altogether an involuntary movement. And it never would have offered any authoritative intimation, about the way in which gratitude ought to be felt, or ought to be expressed, unless the will had had some kind of presiding sovereignty over both the degree and the workings of this affection.

The first way, then, in which the will may have to do with the love of gratitude, is by the putting forth of a desire for the possession of it. It may long to realize this moral accomplishment. It may hunger and thirst after this branch of righteousness. Even though it has not any such power under its command, as would enable it to fulfil such a volition, the volition itself has, upon it, the stamp and the character of virtue. The man who habitually wills to have in his heart a love of gratitude towards God, is a man at least of holy desires, if not of holy attainments. And, when we consider that a way has actually been established, in which the desire may be followed up by the attainment,—when we read of the

promise given to those who seek after God,—when we learn the assurance, that he will grant the heart's desire of those who will stir themselves up to lay hold of him,—when we think that prayer is the natural expression of desire for an object which man cannot reach, but which God is both able and willing to confer upon him,—then do we see how the very existence of the love of gratitude may have had its pure and holy commencement, in such a habitude of the will as has the essential character of virtue engraven upon it. "Keep yourselves," says the Apostle, "in the love of God, by praying in the Holy Ghost."

But again, there are certain doings of the mind, over which the will has a control, and by which the affection of gratitude may either be brought into being, or be sustained in lively and persevering exercise. At the bidding of the will, I can think of one topic, rather than of another. I can transfer my mind to any given object of contemplation. I can keep that object steadily in view, and make an effort to do so, when placed in such circumstances as might lead me to distraction or forgetfulness. And it is in this way that moral praise, or moral responsibility, may be attached to the love of gratitude. Ere the heart can be moved by this affection to another, there must be in the mind

a certain appropriate object, that is fitted to call it, and to keep it, in existence,—and that object is the love of kindness which the other bears me. I may endeavour, and I may succeed in the endeavour, to hold this love of kindness in daily and perpetual remembrance. If the will have to do with the exercises of thought and memory, then the will may be responsible for the gratitude that would spring in my bosom, did I only think of the love of God, and that would continue with me in the shape of a habitual affection, did I only keep that love in habitual remembrance. It is thus that the forgetfulness of God is chargeable with criminality,—and it will appear a righteous thing in the day of judgment, when they, who are thus forgetful of him, shall be turned into hell. It is this which arms, with such a moral and condemnatory force, the expostulation he holds with Israel, "that Israel doth not know, that my people do not consider." It is because we like not to retain God in our knowledge, that our minds become reprobate; and, on the other hand, it is by a continuous effort of my will, towards the thought of him, that I forget not his benefits. It is by the strenuousness of a voluntary act, that I connect the idea of an unseen benefactor, with all the blessings of my present lot, and all the anticipations of my

futurity. It is by a combat with the most urgent propensities of nature, that I am ever looking beyond this surrounding materialism, and setting God and his love before me all the day long. There is no virtue, it is allowed, without voluntary exertion; but this is the very character which runs throughout the whole work and exercise of faith. To keep himself in the love of God is a habit, with the maintenance of which, the will of man has most essentially to do, because it is at his will that he keeps himself in the thought of God's love towards him. To bid away from me such intrusions of sense, and of time, as would shut God out of my recollections,—to keep alive the impression of him in the midst of bustle, and company, and worldly avocations,—to recall the thought of him and of his kindness, under crosses, and vexations, and annoyances,—to be still, and know that he is God, even when beset with temptations to impatience and discontent, —never to lose sight of him, as merciful and gracious,—and above all, never to let go my hold of that great Propitiation, by which, in every time of trouble, I have the privilege of access with confidence to my reconciled Father, —these are all so many acts of faith, but they are just such acts as the will bears a share, and a sovereignty, in the performance of. And, as

they are the very acts which go to aliment and to sustain the love of gratitude within me, it may be seen, how an affection which, in the first instance, may spring involuntarily, and be therefore regarded as a mere instinct of nature, or as bearing upon it a complexion of selfishness, may, in another view, have upon it a complexion of deepest sacredness, and be rendered unto God in the shape of a duteous and devoted offering from a voluntary agent, and be, in fact, the laborious result of a most difficult, and persevering, and pains-taking habit of obedience.

And if this be true of the mere sense of gratitude, it is still more obviously true of the services of gratitude. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" is the genuine language of this affection. It seeks to make a gratifying return of service, and that, under the feeling that it ought to do so. Or, in other words, do we behold that it is the will of man, prompted by a sense of duty, which leads him on to the obedience of gratitude, and that the whole of this obedience is pervaded by the essential character of virtue. This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments. This is the most gratifying return unto him, that ye do those things which are pleasing in his sight. And thus it is, that the love of gratitude may

be vindicated in its character of moral worth, from its first commencement in the heart, to its ultimate effect on the walk and conversation. It is originally distinct from selfishness in its object; and it derives a virtuousness at its very outset, from the aspirations of a soul bent on the acquirement of it, because bent on being what it ought to be; and it is sustained, both in life and in exercise, by such habits of thought, as are of voluntary cultivation; and it nobly sustains an aspect of moral righteousness onwards to the final result of its operation on the character, by setting him who is under its power on a career of obedience to God, and introducing him to an arduous contest of principle, with all the influences of sense and of the world.

If, to render an affection virtuous, the will acting under a sense of duty, should be concerned either in producing, or in perpetuating it; then the love of moral esteem coming into the heart, as an involuntary sensation, may, in certain circumstances, have as little of the character of virtue as the love of gratitude. In this respect, both these affections are upon a footing with each other; and the first ought not to have been exalted, at the expense of the second. That either be upheld within us in our present

state, there must, in fact, be the putting forth of the same voluntary control over the thoughts and contemplations of the understanding,—the same active exercise of faith,—the same laborious resistance to all those urgencies of sense, which would expel from the mind, the idea of an unseen and spiritual object,—the same remembrance of God, sustained by effort, and prayer, and meditation.

II. We now feel ourselves in a condition to speak of the gospel, in its free and gratuitous character,—to propose its blessings as a gift,—to hold out the pardon, and the strength, and all the other privileges which it proclaims to believers, as so many articles for their immediate acceptance,—to make it known to men that they are not to delay their compliance with the overtures of mercy, till the disinterested love of God arises in their hearts; but that they have a warrant for entering even now, into instant reconciliation with God. Now are we to dread the approach of any moral contamination, though when, after their eyes are opened to the marvellous spectacle of a pleading, and offering, and beseeching God, holding out eternal life unto the guilty, through the propitiation which his own Son hath made for them, they

should, from that moment, open their whole soul to the influences of gratitude, and love the God who thus hath first loved them.

We conclude then with remarking, that the whole of this argument gives us another view of the importance of faith. We do not say all for it that we ought, when we say, that by faith we are justified in the sight of God. By faith also our hearts are purified. It is, in fact, the primary and the presiding principle of regeneration. It brings the heart into contact with that influence, by which the love of gratitude is awakened. The love of God to us, if it is not believed, will exert no more power over our affections, than if it were a nonentity. They are the preachers of faith, then, who alone deal out to their hearers, the elementary and pervading spirit of the Christian morality. And the men who have been stigmatized as the enemies of good works, are the very men, who are most sedulously employed in depositing within you, that good seed which has its fruit unto holiness. We are far from asserting, that the agency of grace is not concerned, in every step of that process, by which a sinner is conducted, from the outset of his conversion, to the state of being perfect, and complete in the whole will of God. But there is a harmony between the

processes of grace and of nature; and in the same manner, as in human society, the actual conviction of a neighbour's good-will to me, takes the precedency in point of order of any returning movement of gratitude on my part, so, in the great concerns of our fellowship with God, my belief that he loves me, is an event prior and preparatory to the event of my loving him. So that the primary obstacle to the love of God is not the want of human gratitude, but the want of human faith. The reason why man is not excited to the love of God by the revelation of God's love to him, is just because he does not believe that revelation. This is the barrier which lies between the guilty, and their offended Lawgiver. It is not the ingratitude of man, but the incredulity of man, that needs, in the first instance, to be overcome. It is the sullenness, and the hardness, and the obstinacy of unbelief which stands as a gate of iron, between him and his enlargement. Could the kindness of God, in Christ Jesus, be seen by him, the softening of a kindness back again, would be felt by him. And let us cease to wonder, then, at the preachers of the gospel, when they lay upon belief all the stress of a fundamental operation;—when they lavish so much of their strength on the establishment of

a principle, which is not only initial but indispensable;—when they try so strenuously to charm that into existence, without which, all the elements of a spiritual obedience are in a state of dormancy or of death;—when they labour at the only practicable way, by which the heart of a sinner can be touched, and attracted towards God;—when they try so repeatedly, to hold and to fasten him, by that link which God himself hath put into their hands—and bring the mighty principle to bear upon their hearers, which any one of us may exemplify upon the poorest, and by which both Howard and Fry have tried with success, to soften and to reclaim the most worthless of mankind.

This also suggests a practical direction to Christians, for keeping themselves in the love of God. They must keep themselves in the habit, and in the exercise of faith. They must hold fast that conviction in their minds, the presence of which, is indispensable to the keeping of that affection in their hearts. This is one of the methods recommended by the apostle Jude, when he tells his disciples to build themselves up on their most holy faith. This direction to you is both intelligible and practicable. Keep in view the truths which you have learned. Cherish that belief of them which you already

possess. Recall them to your thoughts, and, in general, they will not come alone, but they will come accompanied by their own power, and their own evidence. You may as well think of maintaining a steadfast attachment to your friend, after you have expunged from your memory all the demonstrations of kindness he ever bestowed upon you, as think of keeping your heart in the love of God, after the thoughts and contemplations of the gospel have fled from it. It is just by holding these fast, and by building yourself up on their firm certainty, that you preserve this affection. Any man, versant in the matters of experimental religion, knows well what it is, when a blight and a barrenness come over the mind, and when, under the power of such a visitation, it loses all sensibility towards God. There is, at that time, a hiding of his countenance, and you lose your hold of the manifestation of that love, wherewith God loved the world, even when he sent his only begotten Son into it, that we might live through him. You will recover a right frame, when you recover your hold of this consideration. If you want to recall the strayed affection to your heart—recall to your mind the departed object of contemplation. If you want to reinstate the principle of love in your bosom

—reinstate faith, and it will work by love. It is got at through the medium of believing, and trusting;—nor do we know a more summary, and, at the same time, a more likely direction for living a life of holy and heavenly affection, than that you should live a life of faith.

SERMON XI.

THE AFFECTION OF MORAL ESTEEM TOWARDS GOD.



PSALM xxvii. 4.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

IN our last discourse we adverted to the effect of a certain theological speculation about love, in darkening the freeness of the gospel, and intercepting the direct influence of its overtures and its calls on the mind of an inquirer. Ere we can conceive the love of gratitude towards another, we must see in him the love of kindness towards us; and thus, by those who have failed to distinguish between a love of the benefit, and a love of the benefactor, has the virtue of gratitude been resolved into the love of our-

selves. And they have thought that there must surely be a purer affection than this, to mark the outset of the great transition from sin unto righteousness; and the one they have specified is the disinterested love of God. They have given to this last affection a place so early, as to distract the attention of an inquirer from that which is primary. The invitation of "Come and buy without money, and without price," is not heard by the sinner along with the exaction of loving God for himself,—of loving him, on account of his excellencies,—of loving him, because he is lovely. Let us, therefore, try to ascertain whether even this love of moral esteem is not subordinate to the faith of the gospel; and whether it follows, that because this affection forms so indispensable a part of godliness, faith should, on that account, be deposed from the place of antecedency which belongs to it.

And here let it be most readily and most abundantly conceded, that we are not perfect and complete, in the whole of God's will, till the love of moral esteem be in us, as well as the love of gratitude,—till that principle, of which, by nature, we are utterly destitute, be made to arise in our hearts, and to have there a thorough establishment, and operation,—till we love God, not merely on account of his love to

our persons, but on account of the glory, and the residing excellence, which meet the eye of the spiritual beholder, upon his own character. We are not preparing for heaven,—we shall be utterly incapable of sharing in the noblest of its enjoyments,—we shall not feel ourselves surrounded by an element of congeniality in paradise,—there will be no happiness for us, even in the neighbourhood of the throne of God, and with the moral lustre of the Godhead made visible to our eyes, if we are strangers to the emotion of loving God for himself,—if additional altogether, to the consideration that God is looking with complacency upon me, I do not feel touched and attracted by the beauties of his character, when I look with the eye of contemplation towards him. I am without the most essential of all moral accomplishments in myself, if I am without the esteem of moral accomplishments in another; and if my heart be of such a constitution that nothing in the character of God can draw my admiration, or my regard, to him—then, though admitted within the portals of the city which hath foundations, and removed from the torments of hell, I am utterly unfit for the joys and the exercises of heaven. I may spend an eternity of exemption from pain, but without one rapture of positive felicity to brighten it. Heaven, in fact, would

be a wilderness to my heart; and, in the midst of its acclaiming throng would I droop, and be in heaviness under a sense of perpetual dissolution.

And let this convince us of the mighty transition, that must be described by the men of this world, ere they are meet for the other world of the spirits of just men made perfect. It is not speaking of this transition, in terms too great and too lofty, to say, that they must be born again, and made new creatures, and called out of darkness into a light that is marvellous. The truth is, that out of the pale of vital Christianity, there is not to be found among all the varieties of taste, and appetite, and sentimental admiration, any love for God as he is,—any relish for the holiness of his character,—any echoing testimony, in the bosom of alienated man, to what is graceful, or to what is venerable in the character of the Deity. He may be feelingly alive to the beauties of what is seen, and what is sensible. The scenery of external nature may charm him. The sublimities of a surrounding materialism may kindle and dilate him with images of grandeur. Even the moralities of a fellow-creature may engage him; and these, with the works of genius, may fascinate him into an idolatrous veneration of human power, or of human virtue. But while

he thus luxuriates and delights himself with the forms of derived excellence, there is no sensibility in his heart towards God. He rather prefers to keep by the things that are made, and, surrounded by them, to bury himself into a forgetfulness of his Maker. He is most in his element, when in feeling, or in employment, he is most at a distance from God. There is a coldness, or a hatred, or a terror, which mixes up with all his contemplations of the Deity; and gives to his mind a kind of sensitive recoil from the very thought of him. He would like to live always in the world, and be content with such felicity as it can give, and cares not, could he only get what his heart is set upon here, and be permitted to enjoy it for ever, though he had no sight of God, and no fellowship with him through eternity. The event to which, of all others, he looks forward with the most revolting sense of aversion and dismay, is that event which is to bring him into a nearer contact with God,—which is to dissolve his present close relationship with the creature, and to conduct his disembodied spirit into the immediate presence of the Creator. There is nothing in death, in grim, odious, terrific death, that he less desires, or is more afraid of, than a nearer manifestation of the Deity. The world, in truth, the warm and the well-known world, is

his home; and the men who live in it, and are as regardless of the Divinity as himself, form the whole of his companionship. Were it not for the fear of hell, he would shrink from heaven as a dull and melancholy exile. All its songs of glory to him who sitteth on the throne, would be to his heart a burden and a weariness;—and thus it is, that the foundation of every natural man has its place in that perishable earth, from which death will soon carry him away, and which the fiery indignation of God will at length burn up; and as to the being who endureth for ever, and with whom alone he has to do, he sees in him no form nor comeliness, nor no beauty that he should desire him.

Now, is not this due to the darkness of nature, as well as to the depravity of nature? There is in our diseased constitution, a spiritual blindness to the excellencies of the Godhead, as well as a spiritual disrelish for them. The truth is, that these two elements go together in the sad progress of human degeneracy. Man liked not to retain God in his knowledge, and God gave him over to a reprobate mind; and again, man walking in vanity, and an enemy to God by wicked works, had his understanding darkened, and was visited with ignorance, and blindness of heart. We do not apprehend God, and therefore it is that we

must be renewed in the knowledge of him, ere we can be formed again to the love of him. The natural man can no more admire the Deity through the obscurities in which he is shrouded, than he can admire a landscape which he never saw, and which, at the time of his approach to it, is wrapped in the gloom of midnight. He can no more, with every effort to stir up his faculties to lay hold of him, catch an endearing view of the Deity, than his eye can by straining, penetrate its way through a darkened firmament, to the features of that material loveliness which lies before him, and around him. It must be lighted up to him, ere he can love it, or enjoy it, and tell us what the degree of his affection for the scenery would be, if, instead of being lighted up by the peaceful approach of a summer morn, it were to blaze into sudden visibility, with all its cultivation and cottages, by the fires of a bursting volcano. Tell us, if all the glory and gracefulness of the landscape which had thus started into view, would charm the beholder for a moment, from the terrors of his coming destruction! Tell us, if it is possible for a sentient being, to admit another thought in such circumstances as these, than the thought of his own preservation. O would not the sentiment of fear about himself, cast out every sentiment of love for all that he

now saw, and, were he only safe, could look upon with ecstacy?—and let the beauty be as exquisite as it may, would not all the power and pleasure of its enchantments fly away from his bosom, were it only seen through the glowing fervency of elements that threatened to destroy him?

Let us now conceive, that through that thick spiritual darkness by which every child of nature is encompassed, there was forced upon him, a view of the countenance of the Deity,—that the perfections of God were made visible, —and that the character on which the angels of paradise gaze with delight, because they there behold all the lineaments of moral grandeur, and moral loveliness, were placed before the eye of his mind, in bright and convincing manifestation. It is very true, that on what he would be thus made to see, all that is fair and magnificent are assembled,—that whatever of greatness, or whatever of beauty can be found in creation, is but a faint and shadowy transcript of that original substantial excellence, which resides in the conceptions of him who is the fountain of being,—that all the pleasing of goodness, and all the venerable of worth, and all the sovereign command of moral dignity meet and are realized on the person of God,—that through the whole range of universal exis-

tence, there cannot be devised a single feature of excellence, which does not serve to enrich the character of him who sustains all things, and who originated all things. No wonder that the pure eye of an angel takes in such fulness of pleasure from a contemplation so ravishing. But let all this burst upon the eye of a sinner, and let the truth and the righteousness of God out of Christ stand before it in visible array, along with the other glories of character which belong to him. The love of moral esteem, you may say, ought to arise in his bosom;—but it cannot. The affection is in such circumstances impossible. The man is in terror. And he can no more look with complacency upon his God, than he can delight himself with the fair forms of a landscape, opened to his view, by the flashes of an impending volcano. He cannot draw an emotion so sweet, and delightful as love, from the view of that countenance, on which he beholds a purpose of vengeance against himself, as one of the children of iniquity. The fear which hath torment casteth out this affection altogether. There is positively no room for it within the bosom of a sentient being, along with the dread, and the alarm by which he is agitated. It is this which explains the recoil of his sinful nature, from the thought of God. The sense of guilt comes into

his heart, and the terrors and the agitations of guilt come along with it. It is because he sees the justice of God frowning upon him, and the truth of God pledged to the execution of its threatenings against him, and the holiness of God, which cannot look upon him without abhorrence, and all the sacred attributes of a nature that is jealous, and unchangeable, leagued against him for his everlasting destruction. He cannot love the Being, with the very idea of whom there is mixed up a sense of danger, and a dread of condemnation, and all the images of a wretched eternity. We cannot love God, so long as we look upon him as an enemy armed to destroy us. Ere we love him, we must be made to feel the security, and the enlargement of one who knows himself to be safe. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear, terrify me,—and then may I love him and not fear him; but it is not so with me.

But let him who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of his own glory, in the face of Jesus Christ,—let us only look upon him as God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses,—let him without expunging the characters of truth, and majesty, from that one aspect of perfect excellence which belongs

to him,—let him in his own unsearchable wisdom devise a way, by which he can both bring them out in the eye of sinners with brighter illustration, and make these sinners feel, that they are safe,—let him lift off from the men of this guilty world, the burden of his violated law, and cause it to be borne by another who can magnify that law, and make it honourable,—let him publish a full release from all its penalties, but in such a way, as that the truth which proclaimed them, and the justice which should execute them, shall remain untainted under this dispensation of mercy,—let him, instead of awaking the sword of vengeance against us, awake it against a sufferer of such worth and such dignity, that his blood shall be the atonement of a world, and by pouring out his soul unto the death, he shall make the pardon of the transgressor meet, and be at one with the everlasting righteousness of God,—in a word, instead of the character of God being lighted up to the eye of the sinner, by the fire of his own indignation, let it through the demonstration of the Spirit be illustrated, and shone upon, by the mild, but peaceful light of the Sun of righteousness, and then may the sinner look in peace, and safety, on the manifested character of the Godhead. Delivered from the burden of his fears, he may now open his whole heart to the

influences of affection. And that love of moral esteem, which before the entrance of the faith of the gospel, the sense of condemnation was sure to scare away, is now free to take its place beside the love of gratitude, and to arise along with it, in the offering of one spiritual sacrifice to a reconciled Father.

Thus, then, it would appear, that the love of moral esteem is in every way as much posterior, and subordinate to faith, as is the love of gratitude. That we may be able to love God, either according to the one or the other of its modifications, we must *first* know that God loved us. We cannot harbour this affection in any one shape whatever, so long as there is the suspicion, and the dread of a yet unsettled controversy between us and God. Peace with our offended Lawgiver, is not the fruit of our love, but of our faith ;—and faith, if it be a reality, and not a semblance, worketh by love. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.—And we love much when we know, and believe, that our sins are forgiven us.

God did not wait for any returning affection on the part of a guilty world, ere he felt an affection for it himself. At that period when he so loved the world, as to send his only begotten Son into it,—did it exhibit the spectacle of an immense prison-house of depravity. Among

the men of it, there was friendship one for another, but there was one unalleviated character of enmity against God. Measuring themselves by themselves, there was often a high mutual esteem for such accomplishments, as were in demand for the good of society;—but that which is highly esteemed among men, is in God's sight an abomination; and when brought to the measure of that universal righteousness which forms the standard and rule of Heaven's government, was it found that our species, had through all its generations broken off from their allegiance, and stood at as wide a distance from the obedient, and unfallen creation, as does a colony of convicts, from the country which has cast them out of its borders. And it was at such a time, when the world liked not to retain God in their knowledge,—when all flesh had corrupted their ways,—when there was none seeking after God,—when there was not the thought or the wish, of a movement to him back again, that he looked with pity on our fallen race, and in the fulness of time, sent his Son into the world to seek and to save us.

And the same is true of every individual to whom the overtures of reconciliation are proposed. God does not wait for any change of affection in our heart, ere we accept of pardon at his hands. But he asks one and all of us

now to accept of pardon, and to submit our heart and character to the influences of that grace which he is ready to bestow upon us. In the gospel he proclaims a pardon ready made for you, a deed of amnesty which he is even now stretching out for your acceptance, a preventing offer of mercy, of which, if you believe the reality, you will feel that he is your friend, and in which feeling you will not be disappointed. He does not expect from you the love of gratitude, till you have known, and believed the great things that he hath done for you. But he expects from you the offering of an homage to his truth. He does not expect from you the love of moral esteem, till, released from the terror of having him for your enemy, you may contemplate, with all the tranquil calmness of conscious safety, the glories and the graces of his manifested character. But he expects from you faith in his declaration, that he is not your enemy,—that he has no pleasure in your death,—that in Christ he is beseeching you to be reconciled,—and stretching out to you the arms of invitation.

The first matter on hand, then, between God and sinners, in the work of making reconciliation, is, that they believe in him. It is, that the tidings of great joy shall fall upon them with credit, and acceptance. It is, that they

count the sayings of the word of this life to be faithful sayings. It is, that they put faith in the record which God hath given of his Son, which if they do, they will believe that God hath given them eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.

There is a certain speculation about the disinterested love of God, which has served to darken and to embarrass this process. It has cast an unmerited stigma on the love of gratitude. But its worst effect, by far, is, that it has impeded the freeness of the overtures of the gospel. It has perplexed the outset of many an inquirer. It has made him search in his own mind for the evidences of an affection, which he never can meet with, till he embrace the offers, and rely upon the promises of the New Testament. It has deposed faith from that post of presiding supremacy which belongs to it, and shifted from its place that great principle on which both the love of gratitude, and the love of moral esteem are suspended.

Let us cease to wonder, then, why faith occupies so much the station of a preliminary in the New Testament. It is the great starting-point, as it were, of Christian discipleship. Grant but this principle, and love, with all the vigour, and all the alacrity which it gives to obedience, will emerge from its operation. There

is no other way, in fact, of charming love into existence; and the gratitude which devotes me to the service of a reconciled God, and the love of his character, which makes me meet for the enjoyment of him in heaven, can only arise in my bosom after I have believed.

Let this consideration shut you up unto the faith. Let it exalt, in your estimation, the mighty importance of a principle, without which there can neither be any sanctification here, nor any salvation hereafter. Think it not enough that you import it into your mind as a bare existence. Know what it is to put it into habitual exercise, to dwell upon the truths which it embraces, and to submit, in feeling and practice, to their genuine operation. This is the only way in which you can ever live a life of faith on the Son of God,—or live by the power of a world to come,—or keep yourselves in the love of God, seeing that it is only when you know and believe that God first loved you, that you can be made to love him.

In the progress of these observations, a few thoughts have occurred, which we trust may be deemed of sufficient importance to be brought forward, and which we bring forward now, as supplementary to the whole argument.

It will have been remarked, that we do not consider man as altogether incapable of the love of moral esteem towards any being whatever. There are certain virtues of character which do call forth the admiration and the tenderness, even of our diseased nature, when they reside somewhere else than in the person of the Deity. Let our depravity be what it may, it were in the face of all observation to affirm, that man does not love truth rather than falsehood, and compassion rather than cruelty, in a fellow-man,—and the interesting question comes to be, how is it that these qualities appear to lose all the force which naturally belongs to them, of attracting our regard, so as to awaken no such sentiment towards God, though they be exemplified by him, in a degree that is infinite?

It will help us, in part, to resolve this question, if we conceive of our man of moral virtues,

that his very truth, and justice, and compassion, lead him, in the defence of wronged or calumniated innocence, to turn the whole force of his indignation on the head of an oppressor; and then think of the feeling which will arise, of consequence, in the heart of the latter. It will be a feeling of hatred and antipathy. And yet we do not see far into the secrecies of the human constitution, if we do not perceive, that, in perfect consistency with this feeling of personal dislike to the man of virtue, who is hostile to him, there may exist, even in his vitiated soul, the love of moral esteem toward virtue residing in some other quarter, or exemplified by some other individual. Instead of this virtue being realized on the person of one who is an enemy to myself, let it be offered by description to my notice, in the person of one who lives in a distant country, or who lived in a distant age, and let the thought of my particular adversary be not offensively suggested to my mind by such a contemplation,—and I, with all those depravities which have provoked the resentment of my upright neighbour against me, and have called forth in my heart a corresponding hatred towards him, will offer the homage of my regard and reverence towards the picture of moral excellence, that is thus set before me. This may look an anomalous exhibition of our

nature; but it certainly is not more so, than the well-known fact of a slave proprietor, at one time wreaking his caprice and his cruelty on the living men who are around him, and at another weeping, in all the softness of pathetic emotion, over the distresses of a fictitious narrative. Distress in one quarter may move our pity. Distress in another may be inflicted by our own hand, to glut our vindictive propensities. Worth, in the person of one who is indifferent, and still more of one who is friendly, may call forth our warm and honest acknowledgments. Worth, in the person of another, the very principles of whose character have moved him to irritate our pride, or to wound our selfishness, may turn him into the object of our most passionate, determined, and unrelenting hostility.

And thus it is, that I may have a natural taste for several of the virtues which enter into the Godhead, and, at the same time, may have a hatred towards the person of the Godhead. This natural taste may be regarded by some, as a predisposing element in my heart towards the love of God; but so long as I view him armed in righteousness to destroy me, will this as effectually repress the embryo affection, as if still it were fast slumbering in the depths of nonentity. It is willingly admitted that there are certain partial sketches of the character of

the Deity, which, if offered to our notice, in a state of separation from his anger against us the children of disobedience, would kindle in our bosoms a feeling of tasteful admiration. But the dread, or the suspicion of his anger absorbs this feeling altogether; and however much we may bear the semblance of love for his character, when we look to certain traits of it in a detached and broken exhibition,—yet this is perfectly consistent with the fact, that the natural mind hates the person of the Deity,—that the natural mind is enmity against God. And this ought to convince us, that even though there should be predisposing elements of love to him for his worth, it is still indispensable, in order to change our hatred into affection, that we should look upon God as having ceased from his anger, or that we should see him arrayed in all the tenderness of offered and inviting friendship. There is a spell by which these elements are fastened, and which can never be done away, till God woo me to friendship and confidence, by an exhibition of good will. Faith in the cross of Christ, is the primary step of this approximation. To call for a disinterested affection towards God, from one who looks upon God as an adversary, and that even though there should be in his bosom the undeveloped seeds of regard to the

worth or character of the Supreme, is to make a demand on a sentient being, which, by his very constitution, he is unable to meet or to satisfy. And is not this demand still more preposterous, when it comes from a quarter where the depravity of man is held to be so entire, that not one latent or predisposing element towards the love of God is ascribed to him? Is it not a still vainer expectation to think, in such hopeless circumstances as these, that ere man seizes the gift of redemption, he shall import into his character the grace of a pure and spiritual affection; that with the terror of his bosom yet unpacified, and the countenance of God upon him as unrelenting as ever, there shall arise, in the midst of all this agitation, a love to that Being, the very thought of whom brings a sense of insecurity along with it; or that a guilty creature, who, even if he had in a state of dormancy within him the principles of moral regard to the Divinity, could not, under the burden of wrath still unappeased, charm these principles out of the state of their inaction,—that he, even were he utterly destitute of these principles, should be able, under this burden, to charm them out of the state of non-existence?

And this, by the way, may serve to show the whole amount of that tasteful sentimentalism,

in virtue of which, a transient but treacherous and hollow regard towards the Divinity, may be detected in the hearts of those who nauseate the whole spirit and contents of the gospel. They admit into their contemplation only as much of the character of God, as may serve to make out a tender or an engaging exhibition of him. They may leave entire the ground-work of his natural attributes; but, in every survey they take of the moral complexion of the Godhead, they refuse to look to all his moral attributes put together, and only fasten their regard upon one of them, even the attribute of indulgence. They cannot endure the view of his whole character; and should this view ever intrude itself, it puts to flight all the pathos and elegance of mere natural piety. Truth, as directed against themselves; Holiness, as refusing to dwell in peaceful or approving fellowship with themselves; Justice, as committed to a sentence of severe and inflexible retribution upon themselves,—all these are out of their contemplation at that moment, when the votaries of a poetical theism feel towards their imagined deity an evanescent glow of affection or reverence. But truth and conscience are ever meddling with this enjoyment; and piety resting on so frail and partial a foundation, never can attain a habitual ascendancy over the

character; and what at the best is fictitious, does not, and ought not, to have more than a rare and little hour of emotion given to it; and this may explain how it is, that with the very same individual, there may be both an occasional recurrence of devotional feeling, and a life of rooted and practical ungodliness. An illusory representation of God will no more draw away our affections from the world, or engage us in the solid and experimental business of obedience to its Maker, than the flippancy of a novel will practically influence the habits of nature, or of society. And thus it is, that the religion which is apart from Christianity, falls as far short of true religion, as the humanity we have just quoted, falls short of true humanity.

But to return. We have already said, that even though there did exist in the heart of man a native regard to certain ingredients of worth in the character of the Divinity, a previous exhibition of good will is still essential, that the person of the Divinity may be endeared to him. And the argument for such a priority, becomes much stronger, when it is made out, on a farther attention to this matter, that there is, in fact, no such native or predisposing regard. For, though it be true, that there are certain moral virtues, which, when realized

upon man, draw towards them the love and the reverence even of our depraved nature, and which, when heightened into perfection upon God, should therefore, it might be conceived, obtain from nature, if placed in favourable circumstances, the homage of a love still more tender, and of a reverence still more profound; yet there is one great and comprehensive quality, by which all the moral attributes of the Godhead are pervaded, and for which, we can detect no native and no kindred principle of attachment whatever, in the constitution of our species. We allude to the holiness of the Godhead. Were we asked to define this holiness, we should feel that we were not giving to the term its full significancy, by saying, that it merely consisted in the absolute perfection of all the moral virtues of the Divinity. It is a term, which, in the appropriate force of it, denotes contrast or separation. It was for this reason assigned to the vessels of the temple, and just because they were set apart from common use. To have made them common, would have been to make them unclean, or unholy. To have turned them to any ordinary or household purposes, would have been to inflict upon them such a touch of profanation, that their holiness would have departed from them. Had there been a full and perfect sense of God in

every house, and in every heart,—had the presence of the Divinity been equally felt by his creatures at all times, and in all places,—had the will of the Divinity held as presiding an influence over the every-day doings, as over the services of the solemn and extraordinary occasion,—then there might have been no temple, and no ritual observation, and, of consequence, no room for such an application of the term holiness. A thing is not consecrated by being set apart from that which is equally pure and sacred with itself; and did there obtain an equal and universal purity throughout the whole system of nature, there could be no need for separation. In these circumstances there would have been no contrast, and, therefore, no demand for such a term as that of holiness.

This may serve to illustrate the force and import of the term, as applied to the character of God. It does not signify the moral perfection of his character, taken absolutely. It signifies this perfection in relation to its opposite. When we look to the holiness of the Divine character, we look to it in its aspect of lofty separation from all that can either taint or debase it. We look to its irreconcilable variance with sin. We look to the inaccessible height at which it stands above all the possible acquirements of created nature, insomuch, that he who possesses it,

charges even his angels with folly: and when created nature is not only imperfect, but sinful, we then look to the recoil of the Divinity from all contact, and from all approximation. We think of the purer eyes than can behold iniquity, and of the presence so sacred, that evil cannot dwell with it. We think of that sanctuary into which there cannot enter any thing that defileth, or that maketh a lie,—a sanctuary guarded by all the jealousies of the Divine nature, and so repugnant to the approach of pollution, that if it offer to draw nigh, the fire of a consuming indignation will either check, or will destroy it.

Now, were the whole severity of this attribute directed against the violations of social kindness, and social equity, we would admit that there was a ready coalescence with it in the principles of our natural constitution. But when it searches into the character of the most urgent affections of nature, and there detects the very essence of sinfulness; when it sits in judgment over the preference given by every child of Adam to the creature, rather than the Creator, and holds this in righteous abomination; when it looks through a society of human beings, and pronounces, in spite of all the justice by which its interests are guarded, and of all the humanity by which its ills are softened, or done away, that, wholly given over to the

enjoyment of the world, it is wholly immersed in the guilt of an idolatry, by which the jealousies of the supreme and spiritual God are provoked to the uttermost; when holiness is thus seen, not merely in its antipathy to crime, which is occasional and rare, but in its antipathy to an affection, the rooted obstinacy of which, and the engrossing power of which, are universal,—then so far from the coalescence of approving nature, do we behold the revolt of pained and irritated nature. It no more follows, because man loathes the cruelty or the injustice of his fellow-man, that he therefore carries in his heart a predisposing element of regard for the essential character of God, than it follows, because a man would sicken with disgust at the atrocities of a prison-house, that he therefore feels his element and his joy to be in the humble piety of a conventicle. A high-minded and an honourable merchant finds room in his bosom for the love both of truth and of the world. Yet the one is an attribute of God, while the love of the other is opposite to the love of God. "If any man love the world," says an apostle, "the love of the Father is not in him." He may like the transcript of truth, and of many other virtues on the face of the creature, but he likes not the Creator. He can gaze, and that even with rapture, on the

partial and imperfect sketches of the unfinished copy, but he shrinks from the view of the entire original. He can hold the intercourse of wistful thoughts, and fervent aspiration, with the absent object of his earthly regard, but he has neither taste nor capacity for communion with his Father in heaven. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," is the anthem of the celestial, but theirs is a delight which he cannot share in. And as surely as his body would need to be transformed, ere it could cease to have pain amid the agonies of hell,—so surely would his mind need to be transformed, ere it ceased to feel a confinement and an irksomeness amid the halleluiahs of paradise.

Even though man, then, had in his heart a nascent affection for the character of God, this would be restrained from passing onwards to an affection for his person, by a sense of guilt, and the consequent dread of God as an enemy. Nor could the love of God be inserted in his bosom, till by faith in the expiation of the gospel, that which letteth was taken out of the way. But still more, if, in conformity to our present argument, there be no such nascent affection for the Divine character, is it hopeless to attempt the establishment of love antecedently to belief, or that attachment should take possession of the heart, ere fear takes its departure away from it? Even if by the working of

some power unknown in the human constitution, or by some effort, the success of which has never yet, in a single instance, been experienced, there could be made to arise in the soul, the love of holiness, previous to the act of trusting in the offered Saviour,—a terror at God, which, in the absence of this trust, is the instinctive and universal feeling of nature, would just as effectually repress the love of holiness, as it does the love of truth, or of compassion, or of justice, from carrying us onwards to a regard for the person of the Godhead. To put the love of God's character into a heart not yet brought into enlargement by the faith of the gospel, would just be to put it into a prison-hold, and there to chain it down to a fruitlessness and inactivity, where it would be wholly unproductive of love to God himself. Confidence must take the precedency of this love, even in a bosom already furnished with the preparatory elements of affection; and how much more essential then is it, that it should take the precedency in a bosom, where these elements are altogether wanting? Faith is thus more strongly evinced to be a thing of prior and indispensable necessity. Without it, even the seed of any precious affection for the Godhead, stifled in embryo, would not blow into luxuriance. And if our nature be such a wilderness that no seed is there,—if the thing wanted be

the germination of a new principle, and not the development of an old,—if it be by a creative, and not by a mere fostering process, that we are transformed into a meetness for heaven,—if the agency that is made to bear upon the human soul, must have a power to regenerate as well as to repair,—and if the promise of this agency be given only to those who believe, then let us no more linger, or be bewildered, in that abyss of helplessness from which faith alone can extricate the inquirer,—let us no longer arrest the eye of confidence from that demonstration of good will, which is held out to the most widely alienated of sinners,—but hasten to place ourselves, even now, on that foundation of trust, where alone we are made the workmanship of God in Christ Jesus, and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

"Destroy this temple," says the Saviour, "and I will raise it up again in three days." It is there alone that we can behold the beauty of the Lord and be safe. This place of greatest security, is also the place of chiefest glory. It is when admitted into this greater and more perfect tabernacle, that we can look on majesty without terror, and on holiness without an overwhelming sense of condemnation. The sinner encircled in mercy looks in tranquil contemplation on all that is awful and venerable in the

character of the Godhead,—and never do truth, and righteousness, and purity, appear in loftier exhibition before him, than when, withheld from his own person, he sees the whole burden of their avenging laid upon the head of the great Sacrifice.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord," says the Psalmist, "that I may dwell in the courts of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." It is not till we are within the portals of the place of refuge that this desire can obtain its fulfilment. Selfishness may have originated the movement which took us there. The fear of the coming wrath may have lent celerity to our footsteps. A joyful sense of deliverance may have been felt, ere the glories of the divine character were seen in bright and convincing manifestation. The love of gratitude may have kindled within us,—and, with the Psalmist, we may have to seek, and to inquire, and to have daily exercise and meditation, ere the love of moral esteem has attained the place of ascendency which belongs to it. Nevertheless, the chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever. This is the real destination of every individual who is redeemed from among men. This should be the main object of all his prayers, and all his preparations. It is this which fits him for the

company of heaven; and unless there be a growing taste for God, in the glories of his excellency,—for God, in the beauties of his holiness,—there is no ripening, and no perfecting, for the mansions of immortality. Though you have to combat, then, with the sluggishness of sense, and with the real aversion of nature to every spiritual exercise, you must attempt, and strenuously cultivate, the habit of communion with God. And as no man knoweth the Father save the Son reveal him, and as it is by the Spirit that Christ gives light to those who believe in him,—for the attainment of this great moral and spiritual accomplishment, do what the Apostle directs you, when he says, " Keep yourselves in the love of God, by praying in the Holy Ghost." Your first endeavours may be feeble, and fatiguing, and fruitless. But God will not despise the day of small things,—nor will the light of his countenance be always withheld from those who aspire after it,—nor will the soul that thirsts after God, be left for ever unsatisfied,—and the life and peace of being spiritually minded, will come in rich experience to his feelings,—and the whole habit of his tastes and enjoyments, will be in diametric opposition to that of the children of the world,—God being the habitation to which he resorts continually,—God being the strength of his heart, and his portion for evermore.

SERMON XII.

THE EMPTINESS OF NATURAL VIRTUE.



JOHN v. 24.

" But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you."

WHEN it is said, in a former verse of the gospel, that Jesus knew what was in man, we feel, that it is a tribute of acknowledgment, rendered to his superior insight, into the secrecies of our constitution. It was not the mere faculty of perceiving what lay before him, that was ascribed to him by the Evangelist. It was the faculty of perceiving what lay disguised under a semblance, that would have imposed on the understanding of other men. It was the faculty of detecting. It was a discerning of the spirit, and that not through the transparency of such unequivocal symptoms, as brought its character clearly home to the view of the observer. But

it was a discerning of the spirit, as it lay wrapt in what, to an ordinary spectator, was a thick and impenetrable hiding place. It was a discovery there of the real posture and habitude of the soul. It was a searching of it out, through all the recesses of duplicity, winding and counterwinding in such a way, as to elude altogether the eye of common acquaintanceship. It was the assigning to it of one attribute, at the time when it wore the guise of another attribute,—of utter antipathy to the nature and design of his mission, at the very time that multitudes were drawn around him, by the fame of his miracles,—of utter indifference about God, at the very time that they zealously asserted the sanctity of his sabbaths, and resented as blasphemous, whatever they felt to be an usurpation of the greatness which belonged to him only.

It was in the exercise of this faculty, that Jesus came forward with the utterance of our text. The Jews, by whom he was surrounded, had charged him with the guilt of profanation, and sought even to avenge it by his death, because he had healed a man on the sabbath-day. And their desire of vengeance was still more inflamed, by what they understood to be an assertion, on his part, of equality with God. And yet, under all this appearance, and even

with all this reality of a zeal about God, did He who knew what was in man, pronounce of these his enemies, that the love of God was not in them. I know you, says he,—as if at this instant he had put forth a stretch of penetration, in order to find his way through all the sounds of godliness which he heard, and through all the symptoms of godliness which he saw,—I know that there does not exist within you that principle, which links to God, the whole of God's obedient creation,—I know that you do not love him, and that, therefore, you are utterly in want of that affection, which lies at the root of all real, and of all acceptable godliness.

It is mortifying to the man who possesses many accomplishments of character, to be told, that the greatest and most essential accomplishment of a moral being, is that of which he has no share,—that the principle on which we expatiated in our last discourses, does not, in any of its varieties, belong to him,—that, wanting it, he wants not merely obedience to the first and the greatest commandment, which is the love of God, but he wants what may be called the impregnating quality of all acceptable obedience whatever,—the spirit which ought to animate the performance of every other commandment, and without which, the most la-

borious conformity to the law of Heaven, may do no more than impress upon his person the cold and lifeless image of loyalty, while in his mind there is not one of its essential attributes.

We know not a more useful exercise than that of carrying round this conviction, amongst all the classes and conditions of humanity. In the days of our Saviour, the pride of the Pharisees stood opposed to such a demonstration; and in our own days too, there are certain pretensions of worth, and of excellence, which must be disposted, ere we can hope to obtain admittance for the humiliating doctrine of the gospel. For this gospel, it must be observed, proceeds upon the basis, not of a partial, but of an entire and universal depravity, among the men of the world. It assimilates all the varieties of the human character into one common condition of guilt, and need, and helplessness. It presumes the existence of such a moral disease in every son and daughter of Adam, as renders the application of the same moral remedy indispensable to them all. The formalists of Judea did not like to be thus grouped with publicans and harlots, under one description of sinfulness. Nor do men of taste, and feeling, and graceful morality, in our present day, readily understand how they should require the same kind of treatment, in the work

of preparing them for immortality, with the most glaringly profligate and unrighteous of their neighbourhood. They look to the ostensible marks of distinction between themselves and others;—and what wider distinction, they think, can possibly be assigned, than that which obtains between the upright, or the kind-hearted, on the one hand, and the ungenerous, or dishonest, on the other? Now, what we propose, in the following discourse, is to lead them to look a little farther,—and then they will see at least one point of similarity between these two classes, the want of one common ingredient with both, and which attaches to each of them a great moral defect, that can only be repaired by one and the same application.

It is well when we can find out an accordancy between the actual exhibition of human nature on the field of experience, and the representation that is given of this nature on the field of revelation. Now, the Bible every where groups the individuals of our species, into two general and distinct classes, and assigns to each of them its appropriate designation. It tells us of the vessels of wrath, and of the vessels of mercy; of the travellers on a narrow path, and on a broad way; of the children of this world, and the children of light; and, lastly, of men who are carnally minded, and men who are spiri-

tually minded. It employs these terms in a meaning so extensive, that by each couplet of them it embraces all individuals. There is no separate number of persons, forming of themselves a neutral class, and standing without the limits of the two others. And were it possible to conceive, that human nature, as it exists at present in the world, were laid in a map before us, you would see no intermediate ground between the two classes which are thus contrasted in the Bible,—but these thrown into two distinct regions, with one clear and vigorous line of demarcation between them.

We often read of this line, and we often read of the transition from the one to the other side of it. But there is no trace of any middle department to be met with in the New Testament. The alternative has only two terms, and ours must be the one or the other of them. And as surely as a day is coming, when all the men of our assembled world shall be found on the right or on the left hand of the throne of judgment—so surely do the carnal and the spiritual regions of human nature, stand apart from each other; and all the men who are now living on the surface of the world, are to be found on the right, or on the wrong side, of the line of demarcation.

We cannot conceive, then, a question of mightier interest, than the situation of this line,

—a line which takes its own steady and unfaltering way through the thousand varieties of character that exist in the world; and which reduces them all to two great, and awfully important divisions. It marks off one part of the species from the other. We are quite aware that the terms which are employed to characterize the two sets are extremely unfashionable; and, what is more, are painfully offensive to many a mind, whose taste, and whose habits, have not yet been brought under the overpowering control of God's own message, expressed in God's own language. They are such terms as would be rejected with a positive sensation of disgust by many a moralist, and would be thought by many more, to impart the blemish of a most hideous deformity, to his eloquent and philosophical pages. It is curious here to observe how much the Maker of the human mind, and the mere observer of the human mind, differ in their views and representations of the same object. But when told, on the highest of all authority, that to be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life and peace, we are compelled to acknowledge with a feeling of earnestness, greater than mere curiosity can inspire, that the application of these terms, is a question of all others the most deeply affecting to the fears, and the wishes of humanity.

In the prosecution of this question, let me attempt to bring a succession of characters before you, most of which must have met your own distinct and familiar observation; and of which, while exceedingly various in their complexion, we hope to succeed in convincing you, that the love of God, at least, is not in them. If this can be made out against them, it may be considered as experimentally fixing to which of the two great divisions of humanity they belong. All who love God, may have boldness, when they think of the day of judgment, because, like unto God, who himself is love, they will be pronounced meet for the enjoyment, and the fellowship of him through eternity. And they who want this affection when they die shall be turned into hell. They shall be found to possess that carnal mind which is enmity against God. So that upon the single point of whether they possess this love or not, hinges the question which I have just now started,—a question surely which it were better for every man to decide at the bar of conscience now, ere it comes under the review of that dread tribunal which is to award to him his everlasting habitation.

I. Let us first offer to your notice, a man living in the grossness of animal indulgence,—

a man, the field of whose enjoyments is altogether sensual, and who, therefore, in addition to the charge he brings down upon himself, of directly violating the law of God, is regarded by the admirers of what is tasteful and refined in the human character, as a loathsome object of contemplation. There is something more here, than mere wickedness of character to excite the regret or detestation of the godly. There is sordidness of character to excite the disgust of the elegant. And let us just add one feature more to this portrait of deformity. Let us suppose the man in question to have so abandoned himself to the impulses of selfishness, that no feeling and no principle whatever, restrains him from yielding to its temptations,—that to obtain the gratification he is in quest of, he can violate all the decencies, and bid away from him all the tendernesses of our common humanity,—that he has the hardihood to set the terrors of the civil law at defiance,—and that, for the money which ministers to every earthly appetite, he can even go so far, as to steel his heart against the atrocity of a murder. When we have thus set before you, the picture of one feasting on the prey of his inhuman robberies, we have surely brought our description as far down in the scale of character, as it can well be carried. And we have done so, on

purpose that you may be at no loss to assign the place which belongs to him. It were a monstrous supposition altogether, that either the love of gratitude, or the love of moral esteem for the Deity, were to be found in the bosom of such a man. He then, of all others, is not spiritual but carnal; nor do we anticipate a single dissenting voice when we say, that whatever be the doubts and the delusions which may prevail about men of another aspect, the man whose habits and pursuits have now been sketched to you, stands on the wrong side of the line of demarcation.

We are far from saying, that a man of such a character as this, is of frequent occurrence in society. We merely set him up as a kind of starting-post, for the future train of our argument. It is a mighty advantage, in every discussion, to have a clear and undisputed outset, —and we trust, that, if thus far we have kept cordially by the side of each other, we shall not cast out by the way, in the progress of our remaining observations.

II. Let us now proceed, then, to detach one offensive feature from the character of him, whom we have thus set before you, as a compound of many abominations. Let us leave entire all his dishonesty, and all his devotedness

to the pleasures of sense, but soften and transform his heart to such a degree, that he would recoil from the perpetration of a murder. This is a different portrait from the one which we formerly exhibited. There is in it an instinctive horror at an act of violence, which did not belong to the other;—and the question we have now to put, is, Has the man who owns this improved representation, become, on this single difference, a spiritual man? We answer this question by another. Is the difference that we have now assigned to him, due to the love of God, or to such a principle of loyal subjection to his authority, as this love is sure to engender? You will not call him spiritual from the mere existence of a feeling which would rise spontaneously in his heart, even though the Father of spirits were never thought of. We appeal to your own consciousness of what passes within you, if the heart do not experience the movement of many a constitutional feeling, altogether unaccompanied by any reference of the mind, to the love, or to the character, or even to the existence of God. Are you not quite sensible, that though the idea of a God lay in a state of dormancy for hours, and for days together, many of the relentings of nature would, in the mean while, remain with you? For the preservation and the order of society, God has

been kind enough to implant in the bosom of man, many a natural predilection, and many a natural horror,—of which he feels the operation, and the people of his neighbourhood enjoy the advantage, at the very time that one and all of them, unmindful of God, are walking in the counsel of their own hearts, and after the sight of their own eyes. He has done the same thing to the inferior animals. He has endowed them with a principle of attachment to their offspring, in virtue of which, they, generally speaking, would recoil from the murder of their young with as determined an abhorrence, as you would do from the murder of a fellow creature. You would not surely say of the irrational instinct, that because amiable, or useful, or pleasing to contemplate, there is any thing spiritual in the impulse it communicates. Then do not offer a violence both to Scripture and philosophy, by confounding, in the mind of man, principles which are distinct from each other. Do not say, that he is spiritual, merely because he is moving in obedience to his constitutional tendencies. Do not say, that he is not carnal, while all that he has done, or abstained from doing, may be done or abstained from, though he lived without God in the world. And go not to infer, while the pleasures of sense are the idols of his every affection—

that because he would shudder to purchase them, at the expense of another's blood, he, on that single account, may be looked on as a spiritual man, and as standing on the right side of the line of demarcation.

III. All this may be looked upon, as too indisputable for argument. And yet it is the very principle which, if carried to its fair extent, and brought faithfully home to the conscience, would serve to convince of ungodliness, the vast majority of this world's generations. If a natural recoil from murder, may be experienced by the bosom, in which there exists no love to God,—why may not this natural recoil be carried still farther, and yet the love of God be just as absent from the bosom as before? There are other dishonesties, of a far less outrageous character, than that by which you would commit an act of depredation; and other cruelties far less enormous, than that by which you would imbrue your hand in another's blood,—which still the generality of men would revolt from constitutionally, and that too, without the movement of any affection for their God, or even so much as any thought of him. We have only to conceive the softening of a farther transformation, to take place on the man, with whom we set out at the beginning of our argument;

and he may thus become, like the man we read of in the parable, who took comfort to himself in the security, that he had goods laid up for many years, and at the same time is not charged, either with violence, or dishonesty in the acquirement of them. He is charged with nothing, but a devoted attachment to wealth; and to the pleasures which that wealth can purchase. And yet, what an awful reckoning did he come under! He seems to have just been such a man, as we can be at no loss to meet with every day in the range of our familiar acquaintances,—enjoying themselves in easy and comfortable abundance; but at an obvious and unquestionable distance from any thing that can be called atrocity of character. There is not one of them, perhaps, who would not recoil from an act of barbarity; and who would not be moved with honest indignation, at the tale of perfidy or of violence. They live in a placid course of luxury, and good humour; and we are far from charging them with any thing which the world calls monstrous,—when we say, that the Father of spirits is unminded, and unregarded by them, and that the good things of the world are their gods. If it be a vain superfluity of argument to prove, that a man may not be spiritual, and yet be endowed with such a degree of natural tenderness, as to recoil from

the perpetration of a murder,—then it is equally indisputable, that a man may not be spiritual, though endowed with such a degree of natural tenderness, as to recoil from many lesser acts of cruelty, or injustice. In other words, he may be a very fair every-day character; and if it be so sure a principle, that a man may not be a murderer, and yet be carnal, then let one and all of you look well to your own security; for it is the very principle which might be employed, to shake the thousands, and tens of thousands of ordinary men, out of the security in which they have entrenched themselves.

IV. But to proceed in this work of transformation. Let us now conceive a still more exquisite softening of affection and tenderness, to be thrown over the whole of our imaginary character. We thus make another step, and another departure, from the original specimen. By the first step, the mind is made to feel a kind of revolting, at the atrocity of a murder; and the character ceases to be monstrous. By the second, the mind is made to share in all the common antipathies of our nature, to what is cruel and unfeeling; and it is thus wrought up to the average of character which obtains in society. By the third step, the mind is endowed with the warmer and more delicate sym-

pathies of our nature, and thus rises to a more exalted place in the scale of character. It becomes positively amiable. You look to him, who owns all these graceful sensibilities, even as the Saviour looked upon the young man of the gospels, and, like the Saviour, you love him. Who can, in fact, refrain from doing homage to such a lovely exhibition of all that is soothing in humanity? and whether he be employed in mingling his tears, and his charities, with the unfortunate, or in shedding a gentle lustre over the retirement of his own family, even orthodoxy herself, stern and unrelenting as she is conceived to be, cannot find it in her heart to frown upon him. But, feeling is one thing, and truth is another; and when the question is put, Do all these sensibilities, heightened and adorned as they are, on the upper walks of society, constitute a spiritual man?—it is not by a sigh, or an aspiration of tenderness, that we are to answer it. We are put on a cool exercise of the understanding; and we cannot close it against the fact, that all these feelings may exist apart from the love of God, and apart from the religious principle,—that the idea of a God may be expunged from the heart of man, and yet that heart be still the seat of the same constitutional impulses as ever,—that, in reference to the realities of the unseen and

spiritual world, the mind may be an entire blank, and there, at the same time, be room in it, for the play of kindly and benevolent emotions. We commit these truths to your own experience, and if carried faithfully to the conscience, they may chase away another of the delusions which encompass it. There is no fear of me, for I have a feeling heart, is a plea which they put a decisive end to. This feeling heart, if unaccompanied by any sense of God, is no better evidence of a spiritual man, than is the circulation of the blood. We are far from refusing it the homage of our tenderness. We feel a love to it, but we will not make a lie about it. We can make no more of it, than Scripture and experience enable us to do. And, if it be true, that a man's heart may be the habitual seat of kind affections, while an affection for God is habitually away from it,—if it be true, that no man can be destitute of this affection, and at the same time be a spiritual man,—if it be true, that he who is not spiritual, is carnal, and that the carnally-minded cannot inherit the kingdom of God;—then the necessity lies upon us: he is still in the region and shadow of death; and if he refuse the arguments and invitations of the gospel, calling him over to another region than that which he now occupies, he must just be numbered among

those more beauteous wrecks of our fallen nature, which are destined to perish and be forgotten.

V. But let us go still farther. Let us suppose the heart to be furnished, not merely with the finest sensibilities of our nature, but with its most upright and honourable principles. Let us conceive a man whose pulse beats high with the pride of integrity; whose every word carries security along with it; whose faithfulness in the walks of business has stood the test of many fluctuations; who, amid all the varieties of his fortune, has nobly sustained the glories of an untainted character; and whom we see by the salutations of the market-place, to be acknowledged and revered by all, as the most respectable of the citizens. Now, which of the two great regions of human character shall we make him to occupy? This question depends upon another. May all this manly elevation of soul, and of sentiment, stand disunited in the same heart, with the influence of the authority of God, or with that love of God which is the keeping of his commandments? The discerning eye of Hume saw that it could; and he tells us that natural honesty of temper is a better security for the faithfulness of a man's doings, than all the authority of religious principle over

him. We deny the assertion; but the distinction between the two principles on which it proceeds, is indisputable. There is a principle of honour, apart in the human mind altogether, from any reference to the realities of a spiritual world. It varies in the intensity of its operation, with different individuals. It has the chance of being more entire, when kept aloof from the temptations of poverty; and therefore it is that we more frequently meet with it in the upper and middling classes of life. And we can conceive it so strong in its original influence, or so grateful to the possessor from the elevating consciousness which goes along with it, or so nourished by the voice of an applauding world, as to throw all the glories of a romantic chivalry over the character of him, with whom God is as much unthought of, as he is unseen. We are far from refusing our admiration. But we are saying, that the Being who brought this noble specimen of our nature into existence; who fitted his heart for all its high and generous emotions; who threw a theatre around him, for the display and exercise of his fine moral accomplishments; who furnished each of his admirers with a heart to appreciate his worth, and a voice to pour into his ear the flattering expression of it;—the Being whose hand upholds and perpetuates the whole of this illustrious ex-

hibition, may all the while be forgotten, and unnoticed as a thing of no consequence. We are merely saying, that the man whose heart is occupied with a sentiment of honour, and is at the same time unoccupied with a sense of Him, who is the first and greatest of spiritual beings, is not a spiritual man. But, if not spiritual, we are told in the Bible, that there are only two terms in the alternative, and he must be carnal. —And the God whom he has disregarded in time, will find, that in the praises and enjoyments of time, he has gotten all his reward, and that he owes him no recompense in eternity.

We appeal to the state of the public mind some years ago, on the subject of Africa, as a living exemplification of the whole argument. " Love thy neighbour as thyself," says the Bible; and this precept, coming with all the force of its religious influence upon the hearts of men, who carry their respects to the will of a spiritual and unseen God, have urged them on, and with noble effect, to the abolition of the deadliest mischief that was ever let loose upon the species. And whether we look to the Quakers, who originated the cause, or to him who pioneered the cause, or to him who pled the cause, or to him who has impregnated with such a moral charm, the atmosphere of his country, that not a human creature can breathe

of its air without taking in the generous inspiration of liberty along with it,—we cannot fail to observe that one and all of them speak the language, and evince the tastes, and are not ashamed to own their most entire and decided preference for the objects of spiritual men. There is an evident sense of religious duty, which gives the tone of Christianity, and throws the aspect of sacredness over the whole of their doings; and the unbaffled perseverance of the many years they had to struggle with difficulties, and to spend in the weariness of ever recurring disappointments, bears striking proof to the unquestionable energy of the Christian principle within them. But who can deny the large and important contributions which came in upon the cause from other quarters? We hold it quite consistent with the truth of human nature, to aver, that in this enlightened country, other principles may have lent their aid to the cause, and, apart from Christianity altogether, may have sent a commanding influence into the hearts of some of its ablest and most efficient supporters. There is nothing in the presence of Christian principle to quell the impassioned fervour of our desires after right objects; but the absence of Christian principle does not necessarily extinguish this fervour. When we look back to the animating ferment of the British

public, on the subject of Africa, we will ever contend, that a feeling of obligation to a spiritual Being, was the ingredient which set it agoing, and which kept it agoing. But who can deny the existence and the powerful operation of other ingredients? An instinctive horror at cruelty, is a separate and independent attribute of the heart, and sufficient of itself to inspire the deepest tones of that eloquence which sounded in Parliament, and issued from the press, and spread an infection over all the provinces of the empire, and mustered around the cause, thousands and tens of thousands of our rallying population, and gave such an energy to the public voice, that all the resisting jealousies, and interests of the country were completely overborne;—and hence the interesting spectacle, of carnal and spiritual men lending their respective energies to the accomplishment of one object, and securing, by their success, a higher name for Britain in the world, than all the wisdom of her counsels, and all the pride of her victories, can ever achieve for her.

Were it our only aim to carry the acquiescence of the understanding, there might be a danger in affirming, and urging, and illustrating to excess, the position that we want to establish among you;—and it were perhaps better, to limit ourselves to one simple delivery of the

argument. But our aim is, if possible, to affect the conscience, and to accomplish this object, not with one, but with many individuals. And when it is reflected, that one development of the principle may come home more forcibly to one man's experienee than another, we must beg to be excused for recurring once more to a topic, so pregnant of consequence to your everlasting interests. There is a sadly meagre and frivolous conception of human sinfulness, that is prevalent amongst you,—and it goes to foster this delusion, that when we look abroad on the face of society, we must be struck with the diversity of character, which obtains among the individuals who compose it. Some there are who, in the estimation of the world, are execrable for their crimes, but others who, in the same estimation, are illustrious for their virtues. In that general mass of corruption, to which we would reduce our unfortunate species, is there, it may be asked, no solitary example of what is pure, and honourable, and lovely? Do we never meet with the charity which melts at suffering; with the honesty which disdains, and is proudly superior to falsehood; with the active beneficence which gives to others its time and its labour; with the modesty which shrinks from notice, and gives all its sweetness to retirement; with the gentleness which breathes

peace to all, and throws a beautiful lustre over the walks of domestic society? If we find these virtues to be sometimes exhibited, is not this an argument against the doctrine of such an entire, and unmitigated depravity, as we have been contending for? Will it not serve to redeem humanity from that sweeping indiscriminate charge of corruption, which is so often advanced against it, in all the pride and intolerance of orthodoxy? What better evidence can be given of our love to God, than our adherence to his law? And are not the virtues which we have just now specified part of that law? Are not they the very virtues which his authority requires of us, and which impart such a charm to the morality of the New Testament?

Now, it carries us at once to the bottom of this delusion, to observe, that though the religious principle can never exist, without the amiable and virtuous conduct of the New Testament; yet, that conduct may, in some measure, be maintained, without the religious principle. A man may be led to precisely the same conduct, on the impulse of many different principles. He may be gentle, because it is a prescription of the divine law;—or, he may be gentle, because he is naturally of a peaceful, or indolent constitution;—or, he may be gentle, because he sees it to be an amiable graceful-

ness, with which he wishes to adorn his own character;—or, he may be gentle, because it is the ready way of perpetuating the friendship of those around him;—or, he may be gentle, because taught to observe it, as a part of courtly and fashionable deportment,—and what was implanted by education, may come in time to be confirmed, by habit and experience. Now, it is only under the first of these principles, that there is any religion in gentleness. The other principles may produce all the outward appearance of this virtue, and much even of its inward complacency, and yet be as distinct from the religious principle, as they are distinct from one another. To infer the strength of the religious principle, from the taste of the human mind, for what is graceful and lovely in character, would just be as preposterous, as to infer it from the admiration of a fine picture, or a cultivated landscape. They are not to be confounded. They occupy a different place, even in the classifications of philosophy. We do not deny, that the admiration of what is fine in character, is a principle of a higher order, than the admiration of what is fine in external scenery. So is a taste for what is beautiful in the prospect before us, a principle of a higher order, than a taste for the sensualities of the epicure. But they, one and all of them, stand at a wide

distance from the religious principle: and whether it be taste, or temper, or the love of popularity, or the high impulse of honourable feeling, or even the love of truth, and a natural principle of integrity,—the virtues in question may be so unconnected with religion, as to flourish in the world, and be rewarded by its admiration, even though God were expunged from the belief, and immortality from the prospects, of the species.

The virtues, then, to which the enemies of our doctrine make such a confident appeal, may have no force whatever in the argument,—because, properly speaking, they may not be exemplifications of the religious principle. If you do what is virtuous, because God tells you so, then, and then only, do you give us a fair example of the authority of religion over your practice. But, if you do it merely because it is lovely, because it is honourable, or because it is a fine moral accomplishment,—we will not refuse the testimony of our admiration, but we cannot submit to such an error, either of conception, or of language, as to allow that there is any religion in all this. These qualities have our utmost friendship; and we give the most substantial evidence of this, when, instead of leaving them to their own solitary claims upon the human heart, we call in the aid of religion,

and support them by its authority: "Whatsoever things are pure, or lovely, or honest, or of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things." But we will not admit, that the mere circumstance of their being lovely, supersedes the authority of religion; nor can we endure such an injustice to the Author of all that is graceful, both in nature and morality, as that the native charms of virtue should usurp, in our admiration, the place of God—of him who gave to virtue all its charms, and formed the heart of man to love and to admire them.

Be not deceived, then, into a rejection of that doctrine which forms the great basis of a sinner's religion, by the specimens of moral excellence which are to be met with in society; or by the praise which your own virtues extort from an applauding neighbourhood. Virtue may exist, and in such a degree too, as to constitute it a lovely object in the eyes of the world, but if there be in it no reference of the mind to the will of God, there is no religion in it. Such virtue as this has its reward in its natural consequences, in the admiration of others, or in the delights of conscious satisfaction. But we cannot see why God will reward it in the capacity of your master, when his service was not the principle of it, and you

were therefore not acting at all the part of a servant to him,—nor do we see how he can reward it in the capacity of your judge, when, in the whole process of virtuous feeling, and virtuous sentiment, and virtuous conduct, you carried in your heart no reference whatever, for a single moment, to him as to your Lawgiver. We do not deny that there are many such examples of virtue in the world; but then we insist upon it, that they cannot be put down to the account of religion. They often may, and actually do, exist in a state of entire separation from the religious principle; and in that case, they go no farther than to prove that your taste is unvitiated, that your temper is amiable, that your social dispositions promote the peace and welfare of society; and they will be rewarded with its approbation. Now, it is well that you act your part as a member of society; and religion, by making this one of its injunctions, gives us the very best security, that wherever its influence prevails, it will be done in the most perfect manner. But the point we labour to impress is, that a man may be what we all understand by a good member of society, without the authority of God, as his legislator, being either recognised or acted upon. We do not say that his error lies in being a good member of society. This, though only a cir-

cumstance at present, is a very fortunate one. The error lies in his having discarded the authority of God, or rather, in his never having admitted the influence of that authority over his heart, or his practice. We want to guard him against the delusion, that the principle which he has, can never be accepted as a substitute for the principle he has not,—or, that the very highest sense of duty, which his situation as a member of society, impresses upon his feelings, will ever be received as an atonement for wanting that sense of duty to God, which he ought to feel in the far more exalted capacity of his servant, and candidate for his approbation. We stand on the high ground, that he is the subject of the Almighty,—nor shall we shrink from declaring the whole extent of the principle. Let his path in society be ever so illustrious, by the virtues which adorn it; let every word, and every performance, be as honourable as a proud sense of integrity can make it; let the salutations of the market-place mark him out as the most respectable of the citizens; and the gratitude of a thousand families ring the praises of his beneficence to the world:—if the actor in this splendid exhibition, carry in his mind no reference to the authority of God, we do not hesitate to pronounce him unworthy, nor shall all the execrations of gene-

rous, but mistaken principle, deter us from putting forth our hand to strip him of his honours. What! is the world to gaze in admiration on this fine spectacle of virtue; and are we to be told that the Being, who gave such faculties to one of his children, and provides the theatre for their exercise,—that the Being, who called this moral scene into existence, and gave it all its beauties,—that he is to be forgotten, and neglected as of no consequence? Shall we give a deceitful lustre to the virtues of him who is unmindful of his God,—and with all the grandeur of eternity before us, can we turn to admire those short-lived exertions, which only shed a fleeting brilliancy over a paltry and perishable scene? It is true, that he who is counted faithful in little will also be counted faithful in much; and when God is the principle of this fidelity, the very humblest wishes of benevolence will be rewarded. But its most splendid exertions without this principle, have no inheritance in heaven. Human praise, and human eloquence, may acknowledge it; but the Discerner of the heart never will. The heart may be the seat of every amiable feeling, and every claim which comes to it in the shape of human misery may find a welcome; but if the love of God be not there, it is not right with God,—and he who owns it, will die in his sins; he is in a state of impenitency.

Having thus disposed of those virtues which exist in a state of independence on the religious principle,—we must be forced to recur to the doctrine of human depravity, in all its original aggravation. Man is corrupt, and the estrangement of his heart from God, is the decisive evidence of it. Every day of his life the first commandment of the law is trampled on,—and it is that commandment on which the authority of the whole is suspended. His best exertions are unsound in their very principle; and as the love of God reigns not within him, all that has usurped the name of virtue, and deceived us by its semblance, must be a mockery and a delusion.

We shall conclude with three observations. First, there is nothing more justly fitted to revolt the best feelings of the human heart against orthodoxy, than when any thing is said in its defence, which tends to mar the credit or the lustre of a moral accomplishment, so lovely as benevolence. Let it be observed, then, that substantial benevolence is rarely, if ever, to be found apart from piety,—and that piety is but the hypocrisy of a name, when benevolence, in all the unweariedness of its well doing, does not go along with it. Benevolence may make some brilliant exhibitions of herself, without the instigation of the religious principle;

but in these cases you seldom have the touchstone of a painful sacrifice,—and you never have a spiritual aim, after the good of our imperishable nature. It is easy to indulge a constitutional feeling. It is easy to make a pecuniary surrender. It is easy to move gently along, amid the visits and the attentions of kindness, when every eye smiles welcome, and the soft whispers of gratitude minister their pleasing reward, and flatter you into the delusion that you are an angel of mercy. But give us the benevolence of him who can ply his faithful task in the face of every discouragement,—who can labour in scenes where there is no brilliancy whatever to reward him,—whose kindness is that sturdy and abiding principle which can weather all the murmurs of ingratitude, and all the provocations of dishonesty,—who can find his way through poverty's putrid lanes, and depravity's most nauseous and disgusting receptacles,—who can maintain the uniform and placid temper, within the secrecy of his own home, and amid the irksome annoyances of his own family,—who can endure hardships, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,—whose humanity acts with as much vigour amid the reproach, and the calumny, and the contradiction of sinners, as when soothed and softened by the poetic accompaniment of weeping or-

phans, and interesting cottages,—and, above all, who labours to convert sinners, to subdue their resistance of the gospel, and to spiritualize them into a meetness for the inheritance of the saints. We maintain, that no such benevolence, realizing all these features, exists, without a deeply-seated principle of piety lying at the bottom of it. Walk from Dan to Beersheba, and, away from Christianity, and beyond the circle of its influences, there is positively no such benevolence to be found. The patience, the meekness, the difficulties of such a benevolence, cannot be sustained without the influence of a heavenly principle,—and when all that decks the theatre of this world is withdrawn, what else is there but the magnificence of eternity, to pour a glory over its path, and to minister encouragement in the midst of labours unnoticed by human eye, and unrewarded by human testimony? Even the most splendid enterprises of benevolence, which the world ever witnessed, can be traced to the operation of what the world laughs at, as a quakerish and methodistical piety. And we appeal to the abolition of the slave trade, and the still nobler abolition of vice and ignorance, which is now accomplishing amongst the uncivilized countries of the earth, for the proof, that in good will to men, as well as glory to

God, they are the men of piety who bear away the palm of superiority and of triumph.

But, Secondly, If all Scripture and all observation, are on the side of our text, should not this be turned by each of us into a personal concern? Should it not be taken up, and pursued, as a topic in which we all have a deep individual interest? Should it not have a more permanent hold of us, than a mere amusing general speculation? Are not prudence, and anticipation, and a sense of danger, all linked with the conclusion we have attempted to press upon you? In one word, if there be such a thing as a moral government on the part of God,—if there be such a thing as the authority of a high and divine legislature,—if there be such a thing as a throne in heaven, and a judge sitting on that throne,—should not the question, What shall I do to be saved? come with all its big and deeply felt significancy into the heart and conscience of every one of us? We know that there is a very loose and general security upon this subject,—that the question, if it ever be suggested at all, is disposed of in an easy, indolent, and superficial way, by some such presumption, as that God is merciful, and that should be enough to pacify us. But why recur to any presumption, for the purpose of bringing

the question to a settlement, when, upon this very topic, we are favoured with an authoritative message from God?—when an actual embassy has come from him, and that on the express errand of reconciliation?—when the records of this embassy have been collected into a volume, within the reach of all who will stretch forth their hand to it?—when the obvious expedient of consulting this record is before us? And surely, if what God says of himself, is of higher signification than what we think him to be, and if he tell us not merely that he is merciful, but that there is a particular way in which he chooses to be so,—nothing remains for us but submissively to learn that way, and obediently to go along with it. But he actually tells us, that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved, but the name of Jesus. He tells us, that it is only in Christ, that he has reconciled the world unto himself. He tells us, that our alone redemption is in him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,—that he might be just, while the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus;—and surely, we must either give up the certainty of the record, or count these to be faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptation.

Lastly, The question may occur, after having established the fact of human corruption, and recommended a simple acquiescence in the Saviour for forgiveness, What becomes of the corruption after this? Must we just be doing with it as an obstinate peculiarity of our nature, bearing down all our powers of resistance, and making every struggle with it hopeless and unavailing? For the answer to this question, we commit you, as before, to the record. He who is in Christ Jesus is a new creature. Sin has no longer dominion over him. That very want which constituted the main violence of the disease, is made up to him. He wanted the love of God; and this love is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. He wanted the love of his neighbour; but God enters into a covenant with him, by which he puts this law in his heart, and writes it in his mind. The Spirit is given to them who ask it in faith, and the habitual prayer, of, Support me in the performance of this duty,—or, Carry me in safety through this trial of my heart and of my principles,—is heard with acceptance, and answered with power. The power of Christ is made to rest on those who look to him; and they will find to be their experience what Paul found to be his,—they will be able to do all things through Christ strengthening them. Now, the

question we have to put is,—Tell us, if all this sound strange, and mysterious, and foreign, to the general style of your conceptions? Then be alarmed for your safety. The things you thus profess to be strange to you, are not the peculiar notions of one man, or the still more peculiar phraseology of another. They are the very notions and the very phraseology of the Bible,—and you, by your antipathy or disregard to them, bring yourselves under precisely the same reckoning with God, that you do with a distant acquaintance, whom you insult by returning his letter unopened, or despise, by suffering it to lie beside you unread and unattended to. In this indelible word of God, you will meet with the free offer of forgiveness for the past, and a provision laid before you, by which all who make use of it, are carried forward to amendment, and progressive virtue, for the future. They are open to all, and at the taking of all; but in proportion to the frankness, and freeness, and universality, of the offer, will be the severity of that awful threatening to them who despise it. How shall they escape, if they neglect so great a salvation?

SERMON XIII.

THE NATURAL ENMITY OF THE MIND AGAINST GOD.



ROMANS viii. 7.

"The carnal mind is enmity against God."

WE should be blinding ourselves against the light of experience, did we deny of many of our acquaintances, that they have either brought into the world, or have acquired, by a natural process of education, such a gentleness of temper, such a docility, such a taste for the amiable, and the kind, such an honourable sense of integrity, such a feeling sympathy for the wants and misfortunes of others, that it would not be easy, and what is more, we may venture to say, from the example of our Saviour, who, when he looked to the young man, loved him, that it would positively not be right, to withhold from

them our admiration and our tenderness. Still it were a violation of all scriptural propriety in language, to say of them that they were not carnal, or not carnally minded. All, by the very signification of the term, are carnal, whose minds either retain their original constitution, or have undergone no other transforming process than a mere process of natural education. Some minds are, in these circumstances, more agreeable to look upon than others, just as some faces are more agreeable than others, to the eye. Each mind has its own peculiar character, just as each face has its own set of features, and its own complexion. But, as all the varieties in the latter, from exquisite beauty to most revolting deformity, do not exclude from any, the one and universal attribute of decay,—so neither may all the constitutional varieties in the former, from the most sordid to the most naturally upright and amiable, exclude the possession of some one and universal attribute; and it may be the very attribute assigned to nature in the text—even hostility against God.

Let us first offer some remarks on the affirmation of the text, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God,"—and then shortly consider, how it is that the gospel of Jesus Christ suits its applications to this great moral disease.

I. It appears a very presumptuous attempt, on the part of a human interpreter, when the object which he proposes, and which he erects into a separate head of discussion, is to prove the assertion of the text. Should not the very circumstance of its being the assertion of the text, be proof enough for you? On what better foundation can your belief be laid than on the testimony of God? and when we come to understand the meaning of the thing testified, is not the bare fact of God being the witness of it, sufficient ground for its credibility to rest upon? Shall man's reasoning carry a greater authority along with it, than God's declaration? Is your faith to depend on the success or the failure of his argument? Whether he succeed in establishing the truth of the assertion or not, upon independent reasonings of his own,—remember that by reading it out in his text, he has already come forward with an argument more conclusive than any which his ingenuity can devise. And yet, how often do your convictions lie suspended on the ability of the preacher, and on the soundness of his demonstrations? You refuse to believe truth, plainly set before you in the Bible, because the minister has failed in making out his point. Now, the truth of the point in question may have already received its decisive settlement,

from the text delivered in your hearing. We may try, and take our own way of bringing the truth of your enmity against God, close and home upon your consciences; but, if there be truth in all the sayings of the Bible, enough has been already said, to undermine the security of your fancied attainments. It is said, that in our nature there is a rooted and an embodied character of hostility to our Maker. This should make the wisest and most sufficient among you feel that you are poor indeed,—and let other expedients, to press home the melancholy truth fail, or be effectual as they may, this is surely enough to convince and to alarm you.

But, though we cannot add to the truth of God, there is such a thing as what the Apostle calls making that truth manifest to your consciences. Your own observation may attest the very same truth, which God announces to you in his word. And if it be a truth, respecting the state of your own heart, this agreement between what God says you are, and what you find yourselves to be, is often most powerfully instrumental, in reclaiming men to the acknowledgment of the truth, and bringing their hearts under its influence. This is the very argument which compelled the faith of the woman of Samaria. "Come and see the man which told

me all the things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" It is the very argument, by which many an unbeliever was convinced in the Apostle's days. The secrets of his heart were made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he worshipped God, and reported that God was in them, of a truth. We cannot make the assertion in the text stronger than God has made it already,—but we may be able to guide your observations to that which is the subject of it—even to your own mind. We may lead you to attend more closely, and to view more distinctly, the state of your minds, than you have ever yet done. If your finding of the matter shall agree with God's saying about it, it may make the truth of the text tell with energy upon your consciences;—and it were well for one and all of us, that we obtained a more overwhelming sense of our necessities than we have ever yet gotten; that we saw ourselves in those true colours of deformity which really belong to us; that the inveteracy of our disease as sinners, were more known and more felt by us; that we could lift up the mantle of delusion, which the accomplishments of nature throw over the carnal mind, and by which they spread a most bewildering gloss over all the rebelliousness and ingratitude of the inner man. Could we but make you feel your need and your helplessness

as sinners,—could we chase away from you the pride and the security of your fancied attainments,—could we lead you to mourn and be in heaviness, under a sense of your alienations and idolatries, and risings of hatred against the God, who created, and who sustains you;—then might we look for the overtures of the gospel being more thankfully listened to, more cordially embraced, more rejoiced in as the alone suitable remedy to the wants and the sorenesses of your fallen nature,—then might we look for the attitude of self-dependence being broken down, and for all trust, and all glorying, being transferred from ourselves, and laid upon Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

It is no proof of love to God that we do many things, and that too with the willing consent of the mind, the performance of which is agreeable to his law. If the same thing might be done upon either of two principles, then the doing of it may only prove the existence of one of these principles, while the other has no presence or operation in the mind whatever. I do not steal, and the reason of it may be either that I love God, and so keep his commandments, or it may be that I have honourable feelings, and would spurn at the disgracefulness of such an action. This is only one example, but the bare statement of it serves for a thousand more.

It lets us in at once to the decisive fact, that there are many principles of action applauded, and held in reverence, and most useful to society, and withal urging us to the performance of what, in the matter of it, is agreeable to the law of God, which may have a practical ascendency over a man whose heart is alienated from the love of God. Propose the question to yourself, Would not I do this good thing, or abstain from this evil thing, though God had no will in the matter? If you would, then put not down what is altogether due to other principles to the principle of love to God, or a desire of pleasing him. The principle upon which you have acted may be respectable, and honourable, and amiable. We are not disputing all this. We are only saying, that it is not the love of God; and should we hear any one of you assert, that I have nothing to reproach myself with, and that I give every body their own, and that I possess a fair character in society, and have done nothing to forfeit it, and that I have my share of generosity, and honour, and tenderness, and civility, our only reply is, that this may be very true. You may have a very large share of these, and of other estimable principles, but along with the possession of these many things, you may lack one thing, and that one thing may be the love of God. An enlightened discerner

of the heart may look into you, and say, with our Saviour in the text, " I know you that you have not the love of God in you."

It is no test whatever of your love to God, that you tolerate him, when he calls upon you, to do the things which your natural principles incline you to do, and which you would have done at any rate. But when he claims that place in your affections which you give to many of the objects of the world,—when he puts in for that share of your heart which you give to wealth, or pleasure, or reputation among men, —then is not God a weariness? and does not the inner man feel impatience and dislike at these grievous exactions? and when the will of God thwarts the natural current of your tastes and enjoyments, is not God, at the moment of urging that will, with all the natural authority which belongs to him, a positive offence to you?

How would you like the visit of a man whose presence broke up some arrangement that you had set your heart upon; or marred the enjoyment of some favourite scheme that you were going to put into execution? Would not you hate the visit? and if it were often repeated,—if the disappointments you received from this cause were frequent and perpetual,—if you saw a systematic design of thwarting you by these galling and numerous interruptions, would not

you also cordially hate the visitor, and give the most substantial evidence of your hatred too, by shunning him, or shutting him out? Now, is not God just such a visitor? O how many favourite schemes of enjoyment would the thought of him, and of his will, if faithfully admitted to the inner chambers of the mind, put to flight! How many fond calculations be given up about the world, the love of which is opposite to the love of the Father! How many trifling amusements behoved to be painfully surrendered, if a sense of God's will were to tell upon the conscience with all the energy that is due to it! How many darling habits abandoned, if the whole man were brought under the dominion of this imperious visitor,—how many affections torn away from the objects on which they are now fastened, if his presence were at all times attended to, and he was regarded with that affection which he at all times demands of us!

This may explain a fact, which we fear must come near to the conscience of many a respectable man, and that is, the recoil which he has often experienced, as if from some object of severe and unconquerable aversion, when the preacher urges upon his thoughts some scriptural representations either of the will or the character of God. Or take this fact in another

way, and in which it presents itself, if not more strikingly, at least more habitually; and that is, the undeniable circumstance of God being shut out of his thoughts for the great majority of his time, and him feeling the same kind of ease, at the exclusion, as when he shuts the door on the most unwelcome of his visitors. The reason is, that the inner man, busied with other objects, would positively be offended at the intrusion of the thought of God. It is because, to admit him, with all his high claims and spiritual requirements into your mind, would be to disturb you in the enjoyment of objects which are better loved and more sought after than he. It is because your heart is occupied with idols, that God is shut out of it. It is because your heart is after another treasure. It is because your heart is set upon other things. Whether it be wealth, or amusement, or distinction, or the ease and the pleasures of life, we pretend not to know; but there is a something, which is your God, to the exclusion of the great God of heaven and earth. The Being who is upholding you all the time, and in virtue of whose preserving hand, you live, and think, and enjoy, is all the while unminded and unregarded by you. You look upon him as an interruption. It is of no consequence to the argument what the occupation of your heart be, if it is such an occupa-

tion as excludes God from it. It may be what the world calls a vicious occupation,—the pursuits of a dishonest, or the debaucheries of a profligate life,—and, in this case, the world has no objection to stigmatize you with enmity against God. Or it may be what the world calls an innocent occupation—amusement to make you happy, work to earn a subsistence, business to establish a liberal provision for your families. But your heart may be so given to it, that God is robbed of his portion of your heart altogether. Or it may be what the world calls an honourable occupation,—the pursuit of eminence in the walks of science or of patriotism; and still there may be an exclusion, or a hatred, of the God who puts in for all things being done to his glory. Or it may be what the world calls an elegant occupation,—even that of a mind enamoured with the tastefulness of literature; but it may be so enamoured with this, that the God who created your mind, and all the tastes which are within it, and all the objects which are without it, and which minister to its most exquisite gratification,—this God, we say, may be turned away from with a feeling of the most nauseous antipathy, and you may give the most substantial evidence of your hatred to him, by ridding your thoughts of him altogether. Or, lastly, it may be what the world calls a virtuous

occupation, even that of a mind bustling with the full play of its energies, among enterprises of charity and plans of public good. Yet even here, wonderful as you may think it, there may be a total exclusion and forgetfulness of God; and, while the mind is filled and gratified with a rejoicing sense of its activity and its usefulness, it may be merely delighting itself with a constitutional gratification,—and God, the author of that constitution, be never thought of, —or, if thought of according to the holiness of his attributes, and the nature of that friendship, opposite to the friendship of the world, which he demands of us, and the kind of employment which forms the reward and the happiness of his saints in eternity, even the praise and the contemplation of himself,—if thought of, we say, according to this his real character, and these the real requirements that he lays upon us,—even the man to whom the world yields the homage of virtue may think of his God with feelings of offensiveness and disgust.

There is nothing monstrous in all this, to the men of our world, seeing that they have each a share in that deep and lurking ungodliness, which has both so vitiated our nature, and so blinded all who inherit this nature against a sense of its enormity. But only conceive how it must be thought of, and how the contempla-

tion of it must be felt, among those who can look on character, with a spiritual and intelligent estimation. How must the pure eye of an angel be moved at such a spectacle of worthlessness,—and surely, in the records of heaven, this great moral peculiarity of our outcast race must stand engraven as that, which of all others, has the character of guilt most nakedly and most essentially belonging to it. That the bosom of a thing formed should feel cold or indifferent to him who formed it,—that not a thought or an image should be so unwelcome to man, as that of his Maker, that the creature should thus turn round on its Creator, and eye him with disgust, that its every breath should be envenomed with hatred against him who inspired it,—or, if it be not hatred, but only unconcern, or disinclination, that even this should be the real disposition of a fashioned and sustained being, towards the hand of his Preserver, —there is a perversity here, which time may palliate for a season, but which, under a universal reign of justice, must at length be brought out to its adequate condemnation. And on that day, when the earth is to be burnt up, and all its flatteries shall have subsided, will it be seen of many a heart that rejoiced in the applause and friendship of this world, that, alienated from the love of God, it was indeed

in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Nor does it palliate the representation which we have now given, that a God, in the fancied array of poetic loveliness—that a God of mere natural perfection, and without one other moral attribute than the single attribute of indulgence—that a God, divested of all which can make him repulsive to sinners, and, for this purpose, shorn of all those glories, which truth, and authority, and holiness, throw around his character—that such a God should be idolized at times by many a sentimentalist. It would form no deduction from our enmity against the true God, that we gave an occasional hour to the worship of a graven image, made with our own hands—and it is just of as little significancy to the argument, that we feel an occasional glow of affection or of reverence, towards a fictitious being of our own imagination. If there be truth in the Bible, it is there where God has made an authentic exhibition of his nature,—and if God in Christ be an offence to you—if you dislike this way of approach—if you shrink from the contemplation of that Being, who bids you sanctify him in your hearts, and who claims such a preference in your regard, as shall dispossess your affections for all that is earthly—if you have no relish for the

intercourse of prayer, and of spiritual communion with such a God—if your memory neither love to recall him, nor your fancy to dwell upon him, nor he be the being with whom you greatly delight yourself, the habitation to which you resort continually,—then be assured, that amid the painted insignificancy of all your other accomplishments, your heart is not right with God; and he who is the Father of your existence, and of all that gladdens it, may still be to you a loathing and an abomination.

Neither does it palliate the representation, which we have now offered, that we do many things with the direct object of doing that which is pleasing to God. It is true, there cannot be love where there is no desire to please; but it is as true, that there may be a desire to please, where there is no love. Why, I may both hate and fear the man, whom I may find it very convenient to please; and to secure whose favour, I may practise a thousand arts of accommodation and compliance. I may comply by action—but instead of complying with my will, I may abominate the necessity which constrains me. I may be subject to his pleasure in my person, and in my performances—but you would not say, while hatred rankled within me, that I was subject to him with my mind. A sovereign may overrule the humours of a rebellious pro-

vince, by the presence of his resistless military—but you would not say that there was any loyalty in this forced subordination. He may compel the bondage of their actual services—but you would not say, that it was in this part of his dominions, where the principle of subjection to him existed in the minds of the people. We have already affirmed, that though our will went along with a number of performances, which in the matter of them were agreeable to God's law—this was far from an unfailing indication of love to God; for there may be a thousand other constitutional principles, the residence and operation of which in the heart may give rise to these performances, while there was an utter distaste, and hostility on our part to God. They may be done, not because God wills the doing, but because the doing falls in with our humour, or our interest, or our vanity, or our instructive gratification. But now we are prepared to go farther, and say, that they may be done, because God wills the doing, and yet there may be an utter want of subjection in the mind, to the law of God. The terror of his power may constrain you to many acts of obedience, even as the call, "Flee from the coming wrath," told on the disciples of John the Baptist. But obedience may be rendered to all the requirements of this prophet. Thieves,

and swearers, and sabbath-breakers, may, under the fear of the coming vengeance, give up their respective enormities, and yet their minds be altogether carnal, and utterly destitute of subjection to the law of God. There may be the obedience of the hand, while there is the gall of bitterness in the heart, at the necessity which constrains it. It may not be the consenting of the mind, to the law of him whom you delight to please and to honour. Now, this is the service for which it is the aim of Christianity to prepare you. It is by putting that law, which was graven on tables of stone, upon the tables of your heart, that it enables you to yield that obedience, which is acceptable to God. He is grieved at the reluctancy of your services. No performances can satisfy him, while your heart remains in shut and shielded alienation against him. What he wants, is to gain the friendship and the confidence of his creatures; and he feels all the concern of a wounded and mortified father, when he knocks at the door of your heart, and finds its affections to be away from him. He condescends to plead the matter, and with the tenderness of a disappointed father, does he say, "Wherein have I wearied you, O children of Israel, testify against me?" You may fear him; you may heap sacrifices upon his altar; you may bring the outer man to

something like a slavish obedience, at his bidding,—but till your heart be subdued, by that great process, which all who are his spiritual subjects must undergo, you are carnal, and you do not love him. Your obedience is like a body without a soul. The very principle which gives it all its value, is wanting. It is this which turns the whole to bitterness. It is this, which, with all the bustling activity of your services, keeps you dead in trespasses and sins. It is this which mars every religious performance, and imparts the character of rebelliousness to every one item, in the list of your plausible and ostentatious duties. There is not one of them which is not accompanied with an act of disobedience, and that too, to the first and greatest commandment, by which we are called upon to love the Lord with all our heart, strength, and soul. Though the hand should be subject,—though the mouth should be subject,—though all the organs of the outer man should be subject; yet it availeth nothing, if the will of the mind is not subject. I could sell all my goods to feed the poor. I could compel my hand to sign an order to that effect,—and I could keep my hand from reversing that order till it was executed. But all this I may do, says Paul, and yet have nothing, because I have not charity. It is not the act of well-doing to

your neighbour, but a principle of love to your neighbour, on which God stamps the testimony of his approbation. In like manner, it is not the act of well-doing to God, but the principle of love to God, which he values;—and if this be withheld from him, you are carnal; and with all your painful and multiplied attempts at obedience, your mind is not subject to the law of God.

We shall conclude, at present, with two short reflections.

First, If any of you are convinced of the justness of the representations which we have now given, you will perceive, that your guilt in the sight of God, may be of a far deeper and more alarming kind, than men are generally aware of. And such a view of the matter may be quite intolerable to him who nauseates the peculiarities of the gospel,—to him who has a contempt for the foolishness of that preaching, of which the great burden is Jesus Christ, and him crucified,—to him, in a word, whom the true description of our moral disease, must terrify or offend,—seeing that he carries a distaste in his heart toward the alone remedy, by which the disease can be met and extirpated.

But Secondly, There is another class of people, whom such a view of the actual state of human

nature ought to tranquillize, by bringing their minds out of perplexity, into a state of firm and confident decision. There are often in a congregation, a set of hearers not yet shut up into the faith, but approaching towards it,—with a growing taste for the Christianity of the New Testament, but without a full and a final acquiescence in it,—with an opening and an enlarging sense of the importance of the gospel, but still halting between two opinions respecting it; who, in particular, are not sure where their sole dependance for salvation should be placed, whether singly upon their own performances, or singly upon the righteousness of Christ, or jointly upon both. Now, we trust that the lesson of our text may have the effect with some, of bringing this unsettled account more speedily to its termination. You may have hitherto, perhaps, been under the impression, that the condition of man was not just so bad as to require a Saviour, who must undertake the whole of his cure, and bring about the whole of his salvation. You have attempted to share with the Saviour in the matter of your redemption. Instead of looking upon it with the eye of the Apostle, as being all of grace, or all of works, you have, in some way or other, attempted a compromise between them; and this has the undoubted effect of keeping you at a

distance from Christ. You have not felt your entire need of him, and therefore you have not leaned in close and constant dependance upon him. But let the torch of a spiritual law be lifted over your characters, and, through the guise of its external decencies, reveal to you the mountain of iniquity within; let the deformity of the heart be made known, and you become sensible of the fruitlessness of every endeavour, so long as the consent of a willing cordiality is withheld from the person and authority of God; let the utter powerlessness of all your doings, be contrasted with the perversity of your stubborn and unmanageable desires, and the case is seen in all its helplessness;—you become desperate of salvation in one way, and you are led to look for it in another way. The question, whether salvation is of grace or of works, receives its most decisive settlement;—when thus driven away from one term of the alternative, you are compelled, as your only resource, to the other term. You feel that nothing else will do for your acceptance with God, but your acceptance of the offered Saviour. You stand at the foot of the cross,—you make an absolute surrender of yourself to the terms of the gospel.

And we know not a more blissful or a more memorable event, in the history of the human soul, than, when convinced that there is no

other righteousness than in the merits, and no other sanctification than in the grace of the Saviour, it henceforth glories only in his cross; and now that every other expedient of reformation has been tried, and failed of its accomplishment, it takes to the remaining one of crying mightily to God, and pressing, at a throne of grace, the supplication of the Psalmist, "Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me."

One thing is certain; you are welcome, at this moment, to lay hold of the righteousness of God, in Christ Jesus; you are welcome, at this moment, to the use of his prevailing name, in your prayers to the Father; you are welcome, at this moment, to the plea of his meritorious obedience, and of his atoning death; and you are welcome, at this moment, to the promise of the Spirit, given unto all who believe, whereby the enmity of their carnal minds will be done away,—God will no longer be regarded with antipathy and disgust,—he will appear in the face of Jesus Christ as a reconciled Father,—he will pour upon you the spirit of adoption,—you will walk before him without fear,—and those bonds being loosed, wherewith you were formerly held, you will yield to him the willing obedience of those whose hearts are enlarged, and who run, with delight, in the way of his commandments.

SERMON XIV.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO DISSOLVE THE ENMITY OF THE HUMAN HEART AGAINST GOD.



EPHESIANS ii. 16.

"Having slain the enmity thereby."

II. WE shall now consider how it is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, suits its application to this great moral disease.

The necessity of some singular expedient, for restoring the love of God to the alienated heart of man, will appear from the utter impossibility of bringing this about by any direct application of authority whatever. For, do you think that the delivery of the law of love, in his hearing, as a positive and indispensable enactment coming forth from the legislature of heaven, will do it? You may as well pass a

law, making it imperative upon him to delight in pain, and to feel comfort on a bed of torture. Or, do you think, that you will ever give a practical establishment to the law of love, by surrounding it with accumulated penalties? This may irritate, or it may terrify,—but for the purpose of begetting any thing like attachment, one may as well think of lashing another into tender regard for him. Or, do you think, that the terrors of the coming vengeance will ever incline a human being to love the God who threatens him? Powerful as these terrors are, in persuading man to turn from the evil of his ways,—they most assuredly do not form the artillery by which the heart of man can be carried. They draw not forth a single affection, but the affection of fear. They never can charm the human bosom into a feeling of attachment to God. And it goes to prove the necessity of some singular expedient, for restoring man to fellowship with his Maker, that the only obedience on which this fellowship can be perpetuated, is an obedience which no threatenings can force,—to which no warnings of displeasure can reclaim,—which all the solemn proclamations of law and justice cannot carry,—and all the terrors and severities of a sovereignty resting on power, as its only foundation, can never subdue. The utterance of the

words, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, or perish everlastingly, can no more open the shut and alienated heart of man, than it can open a gate of iron. Multiply these arguments of terror as you may,—arm them with tenfold energy, and make them to fall in thunder on the sinner's ears,—tell him of the God of judgment, and manifest to him the frown of his angry countenance,—lay before him the grim aspect of his impending death, and spread a deeper mantle of despair over the vast field of that eternity which is on the other side of it;—you may disquiet him, and right that he should be so,—you may prevail on him to give up many evil doings, and right that the whole urgency of the coming wrath should be employed to make him give them up immediately,—you may set him a trembling at the power of God, and better this than spending his guilty career, in thoughtlessness and unconcern, about the great Lawgiver;—but where, in the midst of all this, shall we find obedience to the very first and greatest commandment of the law? Has this obedience been yet so much as entered on? Has love to God so much as reached the infancy of its existence in that heart which is now beginning to be agitated by its terrors? Amid all the bitterness of remorse, and all the fearful looking for of judgment, and all the

restless anxieties of conscious guilt, and anticipated vengeance, tell us, if a single particle of tenderness towards God, has any place in this restless and despairing bosom? Tell us, if it act as an element at all, in this wild war of turbulence and disorder? Or, has it yet begun to dawn upon the mind, and spread its salutary and composing charm over that dark scene of conflict, under which many a sinner has to sustain the burden of the wearisome nights, that are appointed to him? You may seek for love to God throughout all the chambers of his heart, and seek in vain. The man may be acting such reformations as he is driven to, and may be clothing himself in such visible decencies, as he feels himself compelled to put on, and may be labouring away at the drudgery of such observances as he thinks will give him relief from the corrosions of that undying worm, which never ceases to goad him with its reproaches; but as to the love of God, there is as grim and determined an exclusion of this principle as ever,—that avenue to his heart, has never been unlocked, through which it might be made to find its way,—every former argument, so far from having dissolved the barrier, has only served to rivet and to make it more unmoveable. And the difficulty still lies upon us,—how are we to deposit in the heart of man,

the only right principle of obedience to God,—and to lead him onward in the single way of a pure, and spiritual, and substantial repentance?

This, then, is a case of difficulty, and, in the Bible, God is said to have lavished all the riches of his unsearchable wisdom on the business of managing it. No wonder that to his angels it appeared a mystery, and that they desired to look into it. It appears a matter of direct and obvious facility to intimidate man,—and to bring his body into a forced subordination to all the requirements: but the great matter was, how to attach man,—how to work in him a liking to God, and a relish for his character;—or, in other words, how to communicate to human obedience, that principle, without which, it is no obedience at all,—to make him serve God, because he loved him; and to run in the way of all his commandments, because this was the thing in which he greatly delighted himself. To lay upon us the demand of satisfaction for his violated law, could not do it. To press home the claims of justice upon any sense of authority within us, could not do it. To bring forward, in threatening array, the terrors of his judgment, and of his power against us, could not do it. To unveil the glories of that throne where he sitteth in equity, and manifest to his guilty creatures the awful inflexibilities of his

truth and righteousness, could not do it. To look out from the cloud of vengeance, and trouble our darkened souls as he did those of the Egyptians of old, with the aspect of a menacing Deity, could not do it. To spread the field of an undone eternity before us, and tell us of those dreary abodes where each criminal hath his bed in hell, and the centuries of despair which pass over him are not counted, because there no seasons roll, and the unhappy victims of the tribulation, and the wrath, and the anguish, know, that for the mighty burden of the sufferings which weigh upon them, there is no end, and no mitigation; this prospect, appalling as it is, and coming home upon the belief, with all the characters of the most immutable certainty, could not do it. The affections of the inner man remain as unmoved as ever, under the successive and repeated influence of all these dreadful applications. There is not one of them, which, instead of conciliating, does not stir up a principle of resistance; and, subject any human creature to the treatment of them all, and to nothing else, and he may tremble at God, and shrink from the contemplation of God, and feel an overpowering awe at the thought of God, when that thought visits him, but we maintain, that not one particle of influence has been sent into his heart,

to make him love God. Under such applications as these, we can conceive the creature, gathering a new energy from despair, and mustering up a stouter defiance than ever, to the God who threatens him. Strange contest between the thing formed and him who formed it! —but we see it exhibited among the determined votaries of wickedness in life; and it is the very contest which gives its moral aspect to hell throughout all eternity. There, God reigns in vindictive majesty, and there, every heart of every outcast, sheathed in impenetrable hardness, mutters its blasphemies against him. O hideous and revolting spectacle! and how awful to think, that the unreclaimed sons of profligacy, who pour along our streets, and throng our markets, and form the fearful majority in almost every chamber of business, and in every workshop of industry, are thither speeding their infatuated way! What a wretched field of contemplation is around us, when we see on every side of it the mutual encouragement,—the ever-plying allurements,—the tacit, though effectual and well understood combination, sustaining, over the whole face of this alienated world, a firm and systematic rebellion against God! We are not offering an exaggerated picture when we say, that within reach of the walk of a single hour, there are thousands, and thousands

more, who have cast away from them the authority of God; and who have been nerved by all his threatenings into a more determined attitude of wickedness; and who glory in their unprincipled dissipations; and who, without one sigh at the moving spectacle of ruined innocence, will, in the hearing of companions younger than themselves, scatter their pestilential levities around them, and care not though the hope of parents, and the yet unvitiated delicacy of youth, shall wither and expire under the contagion of their ruffian example; and will patronise every step of that progress which leads from one depravity to another, till their ill-fated proselyte, made as much the child of hell as themselves, shall share in that common ruin, which, in the great day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, will come forth from the storehouse of his wrath, in one mighty torrent, on the heads of all who boast of their iniquity. We have now touched on the limits of a subject of which half its horrors are untold; but through which, the minister of the counsels of heaven must clear his intrepid way, in spite of all its painfulness. We will not pursue it at present, but neither will we count the digression out of place, should a single parent among you be led, from what we have now uttered, to be jealous over his chil-

dren with a godly jealousy, and not to suffer those, for whose eternity he is so deeply responsible, to take their random direction through society, just where the prospects of business, and of worldly advantage, may chance to carry them; to calculate on the possibilities of moral corruption, as well as on the possibilities of lucrative employment; to look well to exposures and acquaintances, and hours of social entertainment, as well as to the common-place object of a situation in the world. And when you talk of a good line for your children, just think a little more of the line that leadeth to eternity, and have a care lest you be the instrument of putting them on such a path of danger, that it shall only be by the very rarest miracle of grace, that your helpless young can be kept from falling, or be renewed again into repentance.

But the difficulty in question still remains unresolved. How then is this regeneration to be wrought, if no threatenings can work it,—if no terrors of judgment can soften the heart into that love of God, which forms the chief feature of repentance,—if all the direct applications of law and of righteous authority, and of its tremendous and immutable sanctions, so far from attaching man in tenderness to his God, have only the effect of impressing a violent recoil

upon all his affections, and, by the hardening influence of despair, of stirring up in his bosom a more violent antipathy than ever? Will the high and solemn proclamations of a menacing Deity not do it? This is not the way in which the heart of man can be carried. He is so constituted, that the law of love can never never be established within him by the engine of terror; and here is the barrier to this regeneration on the part of man. But if a threat of justice cannot do it, will an act of forgiveness do it? This again is not the way in which God can admit the guilty to acceptance. He is so constituted, that his truth cannot be trampled upon, and his government cannot be despoiled of its authority, and its sanctions cannot, with impunity, be defied, and every solemn utterance of the Deity cannot but find its accomplishment, in such a way as may vindicate his glory, and make the whole creation he has formed stand in awe of its Almighty Sovereign. And here is another barrier on the part of God; and that economy of redemption, in which a dead and undiscerning world see no skilfulness to admire, and no feature of graciousness to allure, was so planned, in the upper councils of heaven, that it maketh known, to principalities and powers, the manifold wisdom of Him who devised it. The men of this infidel generation, whose every faculty is

so bedimmed by the grossness of sense, that they cannot lay hold of the realities of faith, and cannot appreciate them,—to them the barriers we have now insisted on, which lie in the way of man taking God into his love, and of God taking man into his acceptance, may appear to be so many faint and shadowy considerations, of which they feel not the significancy; but, to the pure and intellectual eye of angels, they are substantial obstacles, and One mighty to save had to travail in the greatness of his strength, in order to move them away. The Son of God descended from heaven, and he took upon him the nature of man, and he suffered in his stead, and he consented that the whole burden of offended justice should fall upon him, and he bore in his own body on the tree, the weight of all those accomplishments by which his Father behoved to be glorified, and after having magnified the law, and made it honourable, by pouring out his soul unto the death for us, he went up on high, and by an arm of everlasting strength, levelled that wall of partition which lay across the path of acceptance; and thus it is, that the barrier on the part of God is done away, and he, with untarnished glory, can dispense forgiveness over the whole extent of a guilty creation, because he can be just, while he is the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.

And if the barrier, on the part of God, is thus moved aside, why not the barrier on the part of man? Does not the wisdom of redemption show itself here also? Does it not embrace some skilful contrivance, by which it penetrates those mounds that beset the human heart, and ward the entrance of the principle of love away from it, and which all the direct applications of terror and authority, have only the effect of fixing more immoveably upon their basis? Yes it does,—for it changes the aspect of the Deity towards man; and were man only to have faith in the announcements of the gospel, so as to see God with the eye of his mind under this new aspect,—love to God would spring up in his heart, as the unfailing consequence. Let man see God as he sets himself forth in this wonderful revelation, and let him believe the reality of what he sees; and he cannot but love the Being he is employed in contemplating. Without this gospel, he may see him to be a God of justice; but he cannot do this without seeing the frown of severity directed against himself, a wretched offender. With this gospel, he sees the full burden of violated justice born away from him; and God stands before him unrobed of all his severities, and tenderly inviting him to draw near through that blood of atonement which was shed, the just for the unjust, to bring

the sinner unto God. Without this gospel, he may see the truth of God; but he sees it pledged, to the fulfilment of the most awful threatenings against him: with this gospel, he sees the full weight of all these accomplishments, resting on the head of the great Sacrifice; and God's truth is now fully embarked on the most cheering assurances of pardon, on the most liberal invitations of good will, on the most exceeding great and precious promises. Without this gospel, he may see the government of God leaning on the pillars of that immutability which upholds it; but this very immutability is to him the sentence of despair; and how can he love that face, on which are stamped the characters of a stern and vindictive majesty? With this gospel, the face of God stands legibly revealed to him in other characters. That law which, resting on the solemn authority of its firm and unalterable requirements, demanded a fulfilment, up to the last jot and tittle of it, has been magnified, and has been made honourable, by one illustrious Sufferer, who put forth the greatness of his strength, in that dark hour of the travail of his soul, when he bore the burden of all its penalties. That wrath which should have been discharged on the guilty millions he died for, was all concentred upon him, who took upon himself the chastisement of

our peace, and on that day of mysterious agony, drank, to the very dregs, the cup of our expiation. And God, who planned the whole work of this wonderful redemption,—God, who in love to a guilty world sent his Son amongst us to accomplish it,—God, who rather than lose his alienated creatures, as he could not strip his eternal throne of a single attribute that supported it, awoke the sword of vengeance against his fellow, that on him the truth and the justice of the Deity might receive their most illustrious vindication,—God, who, out of Christ, sits surrounded with all the darkness of unapproachable majesty, is now God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses. His tender mercy is now free to rejoice amid all the glory of his other bright and untarnished perfections, and he pours the expression of this tenderness with an unsparing hand, over the whole extent of his sinful creation,—and he lets himself down to the language of a beseeching supplicant, praying that each and every one of us might be reconciled unto him,—and, putting on a winning countenance of invitation to the guiltiest of us all, he tells us, that if we only come to him through the appointed Mediator, he will blot out, as with a thick cloud, our transgressions,—and that, as if carried away to a land that was

not inhabited, he will make no more mention of them.

And thus it is, that the goodness of God destroyeth the enmity of the human heart. When every other argument fails, this, if perceived by the eye of faith, finds its powerful and persuasive way through every barrier of resistance. Try to approach the heart of man by the instruments of terror and of authority, and it will disdainfully repel you. There is not one of you skilled in the management of human nature, who does not perceive, that, though this may be a way of working on the other principles of our constitution,—of working on the fears of man, or on his sense of interest, this is not the way of gaining by a single hair-breadth on the attachments of his heart. Such a way may force, or it may terrify, but it never can endear; and after all the threatening array of such an influence as this is brought to bear upon man, there is not one particle of service it can extort from him, but what is all rendered in the spirit of a painful and reluctant bondage. Now, this is not the service which prepares for heaven. This is not the service which assimilates men to angels. This is not the obedience of those glorified spirits, whose every affection harmonizes with their every performance; and the very essence of whose piety consists of delight in

God, and the love they bear to him. To bring up man to such an obedience as this, his heart behoved to be approached in a peculiar way; and no such way is to be found, but within the limits of the Christian revelation. There alone you see God, without injury to his other attributes, plying the heart of man with the irresistible argument of kindness. There alone do you see the great Lord of heaven and of earth, setting himself forth to the most worthless and the most wandering of his children,—putting forth his own hand to the work of healing the breach which sin had made between them,—telling him that his word could not be set aside, and his threatenings could not be mocked, and his justice could not be defied and trampled on, and that it was not possible for his perfections to receive the slightest taint in the eyes of the creation he had thrown around him; but that all this was provided for, and not a single creature within the compass of the universe he had formed, could now say, that forgiveness to man was degrading to the authority of God, and that by the very act of atonement, which poured a glory over all the high attributes of his character, his mercy might now burst forth without limit, and without control, upon a guilty world, and the broad flag of invitation be unfurled in the sight of all its families.

Let the sinner, then, look to God through the medium of such a revelation; and the sight which meets him there, may well tame the obstinacy of that heart, which had wrapped itself up in impenetrable hardness against the force of every other consideration. Now that the storm of the Almighty's wrath has been discharged upon him who bore the burden of the world's atonement, he has turned his throne of glory into a throne of grace, and cleared away from the pavilion of his residence, all the darkness which encompassed it. The God who dwelleth there, is God in Christ; and the voice he sends from it, to this dark and rebellious province of his mighty empire, is a voice of the most beseeching tenderness. Good will to men is the announcement with which his messengers come fraught to a guilty world; and, since the moment in which it burst upon mortal ears from the peaceful canopy of heaven, may the ministers of salvation take it up, and go round with it among all the tribes and individuals of the species. Such is the real aspect of God towards you. He cannot bear that his alienated children should be finally and everlastingly away from him. He feels for you all the longing of a parent bereaved of his offspring. To woo you back again unto himself, he scatters among you the largest and the most liberal assurances, and

with a tone of imploring tenderness, does he say to one and to all of you, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die?" He has no pleasure in your death. He does not wish to glorify himself by the destruction of any one of you. "Look to me all ye ends of the earth, and be saved, is the wide and the generous announcement, by which he would recall, from the very outermost limits of his sinful creation, the most worthless and polluted of those who have wandered away from him. Now give us a man who perceives, with the eye of his mind, the reality of all this, and you give us a man in possession of the principle of faith. Give us a man in possession of this faith; and his heart, shielded, as it were, against the terrors of a menacing Deity, is softened and subdued, and resigns its every affection at the moving spectacle of a beseeching Deity: and thus it is that faith manifests the attribute which the Bible assigns to it, of working by love. Give us a man in possession of this love; and animated as he is, with the living principle of that obedience, where the willing and delighted consent of the inner man goes along with the performance of the outer man, his love manifests the attribute which the Bible assigns to it, when it says, "This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments." And thus it is, amid the fruit-

lessness of every other expedient, when power threatened to crush the heart which it could not soften,—when authority lifted its voice, and laid on man an enactment of love which it could not carry,—when terror shot its arrows, and they dropped ineffectual from that citadel of the human affections, which stood proof against the impression of every one of them,—when wrath mustered up its appalling severities, and filled that bosom with despair which it could not fill with the warmth of a confiding attachment,—then the kindness of an inviting God was brought to bear on the heart of man, and got an opening through all its mysterious avenues. Goodness did what the nakedness of power could not do. It found its way through all the intricacies of the human constitution, and there, depositing the right principle of repentance, did it establish the alone effectual security for the right purposes, and the right fruits of repentance.

SERMON XV.

THE EVILS OF FALSE SECURITY.

JEREMIAH vi. 14.

"They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

WE must all have remarked, on what a slight and passing consideration people will dispose of a question which relates to the interest of their eternity; and how strikingly this stands contrasted with the very deep, and earnest, and long-sustained attention, which they bestow on a question that relates to their interest, or their fortune, in this world. Ere they embark, for example, on an enterprise of trade, they will look at all the sides, and all the possibilities of the speculation; and every power of thought within them, will be put to its busiest exercise, and they will enter upon it with much fearful-

ness, and they will feel an anxious concern in every step, and every new evolution, of such an undertaking. Compare this with the very loose and summary way in which they make up their minds about the chance of happiness in another world. See at how easy a rate they will be satisfied with some maxim of security, the utterance of which serves as a bar against all further prosecution of the subject. Behold the use they make of some hastily assumed principle in religion,—not for the purpose of fastening their minds upon it, but for the purpose, in fact, of hurrying their minds away from it. For it must be observed of the people to whom we allude, that, in spite of all their thoughtlessness about the affairs of the soul, they are not altogether without some opinion on the matter; and in which opinion there generally is comprised all the theology of which they are possessed. Without some such opinion, even the most regardless of men might feel themselves in a state of restlessness; and therefore it is, however seldom they are visited with any thought about eternity, and however gently this thought touches them, and however quickly it passes away, to be replaced by some of the more urgent vanities and interests of time, yet, with most men, there is something like an actual making up of their minds, on this awfully important

subject. There is a settlement they have come to about it, which, generally speaking, serves them to the end of their days;—and on the strength of which, there are many who can hush within them, every alarm of conscience, and repel from without them, the whole force of a preacher's demonstration, and all that power of disquietude which lies in his faithful and impressive warnings.

We speak in reference to a very numerous set of individuals, among the upper and middling classes of society. There is a class of what may be called slender and sentimental religionists, who do profess a reverence for the matter, and maintain many of its outward decencies, and are visited with occasional thoughts, and occasional feelings of tenderness about death, and duty, and eternity, and would be shocked at the utterance of an infidel opinion; and with all these symptoms of a religious inclination about them, have their minds very comfortably made up, and altogether free from any apprehension, either of present wrath, or of coming vengeance. Now, on examining the ground of their tranquillity, we are at a loss to detect a single ingredient of that peace and joy in believing, which we read of among the Christians of the New Testament. It is not that Christ is set forth a propitiation for their sins,—

it is not that they stagger not at the promise of God, because of unbelief,—it is not that the love of him is shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost,—it is not that they carry along with them any consciousness whatever, of a growing conformity to the image of the Saviour; —it is not that their calling and their election are made sure to them, by the successful diligence with which they are cultivating the various accomplishments of the Christian character; —there is not one of these ingredients, we will venture to say, which enters into the satisfaction that many feel with their own prospects, and into the complacency they have in their own attainments, and into their opinion, that God is looking to them with indulgence and friendship. With most of them, there is not only an ignorance, but a positive disgust, about these things. They associate with them the charges of methodism, and mysticism, and fanaticism; and meanwhile cherish in their own hearts, a kind of impregnable confidence, resting entirely on some other foundation.

We believe the real cause of their tranquillity to be, just that eternity is not seen nearly enough, or urgently enough, to disturb them. It stands so far away on the back ground of their contemplation, that they are almost entirely taken up with the intervening objects.

Any glimpse they have of the futurity which lies on the other side of time, is so faint, and so occasional, that its concerns never come to them with the urgency of a matter on hand. It is not so much because they think in a particular way on this topic, that they feel themselves to be at peace. It is rather, because they think so little of it. Still, however, they do have a transient and occasional thought, and it is all on the side of tranquillity; and could this thought be exposed as a minister of deceitful complacency to the heart, it may have the effect of working in it a salutary alarm, and of making the possessor of it see the nakedness of his condition, and of undermining every other trust but a trust in the offered salvation of the gospel, and of unsettling the blind and easy confidence of his former days, and of prompting him with the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" and of leading him to try this question by the light of revelation, and to prosecute it to a scriptural conclusion, till he came to the answer of, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

What is the way, then, in which they do actually make up their minds upon this subject? There is, in the first place, a pretty general admission, that we are sinners, though along with this, there is a disposition to palliate the enor-

mity of sin, and to gloss it over with the gentle epithet of an infirmity. It is readily allowed, then, that we have our infirmities; and then to make all right, and secure, and comfortable, the sentiment with which they bring the matter round again, is, that though we have our infirmities, God is a merciful God, and he will overlook them. This vague, and general, and indistinct apprehension of the attribute of mercy is the anchor of their hope; not a very sure and steadfast one certainly, but just as sure and as steadfast, as, in their peaceful state of unconcern, they have any demand for. A vessel in smooth water needs not be very strongly fastened in her moorings; and really any convictions of sin they have, agitate them so gently, that a very slender principle indeed, uttered occasionally by the mouth, and with no distinct or perceptible hold upon the heart, is enough to quiet and subdue all that is troublesome within them. A slight hurt needs but a slight remedy, and however virulent the disease may be, yet, if the patient be but gently alarmed, a gentle application is enough to pacify him in the mean time. Now, a tasteful and a tender sentiment about the goodness of God, is just such an application. He will not be severe upon our weaknesses; he will not cast a glance of stern and unrelenting indignation upon us.

It is true, that there is to be met with, among the vilest dregs and refuse of society, a degree of profligacy, for which it would really be too much to expect forgiveness. The use of hell is for the punishment of such gross and enormous wickedness as this. But the people who are so very depraved, and so very shocking, stand far beneath the place which we occupy in the scale of character. We, with our many amiable, and good, and neighbour-like points and accomplishments, are fair and befitting subjects for the kindness of God. When we err, we shall betake ourselves to a trust in that indulgence, which gives to our religion the aspect of so much cheerfulness; and we will school down all that is disquieting, by a sentiment of confidence in that mercy which is soothing to our hearts, and which we delight to hear expatiated upon, in terms of tastefulness, by the orators of a genteel and cultivated piety.

Under this loose system of confidence, then, by which the peace of so many a sinner is upheld, it is the general mercy of God on which he rests. I shall, therefore, in the first place, endeavour to prove the vanity of such a confidence; and, in the second place, the evils of it.

I. There is one obvious respect, in which this mercy, that is so slenderly spoken of, and so vaguely trusted in, is not in unison with truth;

and that is, it is not the mercy which has been made the subject of an actual offer from God to man, in the true message that he has been pleased to deliver to the world. In this message, God makes a free offer of his mercy, no doubt; but he offers it on a particular footing, and on that footing only, will he have it to be received. Along with the revelation he makes of his attribute of mercy, he bids us look to the particular way, in which he chooses that attribute to be put forth. The man who steps forward to relieve you of your debts, by an act of gratuitous kindness, may surely reserve the privilege of doing it in his own way; and whether it be by a present in goods, or by a present in money, or by an order upon a third person, or by the appointment of one whom he makes the agent of his beneficence, and whom he asks you to correspond with, and to draw upon,—it would surely be most preposterous in you to quarrel with his generosity, because it would have been more to your taste, had it come to you through a different channel of conveyance. He has a fair right of insisting upon his own way of it; and if you will not acquiesce in this way, and he leave you under your burden, you have nothing to complain of. You might have liked it better, had he authorized you to draw upon himself, rather than on the agent he has fixed upon.

But no; he has his reasons, and he persists in his own way of it, and you must either go along with this way, or throw yourself out of the benefit of his generosity altogether. It is conceivable, that, in spite of all this, you may be so very perverse as to draw upon himself, instead of drawing upon the authorized agent. Well, the effect is, just that your draft is dishonoured, and your debt still lies upon you; and you, by your wilful resistance to the plan of relief laid down, are left to remain under the full weight of your embarrassments.

And so of God. He may, and he actually has stepped forward, to relieve us from that debt of sin under which we lie. But he has taken his own way of it. He has not left us to dictate the matter to him,—but he himself has found out a ransom. He offers us eternal life; but he tells us where this is to be found, even in his Son, and he bids us look unto him, and be saved; and he says, that he who hath the Son hath life, and that he who believeth not the Son, the wrath of God abideth on him. To restrain, as it were, our immediate approaches to himself, he reveals an agent, a Mediator between God and man,—and he lets us know, that no one cometh unto the Father, but by him. He makes a free offer of salvation,—but it is in and through Jesus Christ, to

whom the whole revealed word of God directs our eye, as the prime agent in the recovery of a guilty world. To say that we have our infirmities, but God is merciful, is like drawing direct upon God himself. But God tells us that he will not be so drawn upon. He chooses, and has he not the right of choosing, to bestow all his favours upon a guilty world, in and through his Son Christ Jesus? If you choose to object to this way, you must just abide by the consequences. The offer is made. God sets himself forward as merciful. But he lets you know, at the same time, the particular way in which he chooses to be so. This way may be an offence to you. You would perhaps have liked better, had there been no Christ, no preaching of his cross, nothing said about his cleansing and peace-speaking blood,—in a word, nothing of all that which forms the burden of methodistical sermons, and which, if met with in the New Testament at all, is only to be found in what you may think its dark and mystical passages. It would have been more congenial to your taste, perhaps, had you been left to the undisturbed enjoyment of your own soothing and elegant conceptions,—could you just have gone direct to God himself, whom the eye of your imagination had stripped of all tremendous severity against sin, of all the pure and holy

jealousies of his nature, of all that is majestic in the high attributes of truth and righteousness. A God singly possessed of tenderness, in virtue of which, he would smile connivance at all our infirmities, and bend an indulgent eye over the waywardness of a heart, devoted with all its affections to the vanities and pleasures of time, —this would be a God highly suited to the taste and convenience of a guilty world. But, alas! there is no such God. To trust in the mercy of such a Being as this, is to lean on a nonentity of your own imagination. It is to be led astray, by a fancy picture of your own forming. There is no other God to whom you can repair for mercy, but God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses. And if you resist the preaching of Christ as foolishness,—if you will not recognise him, but persist in your hoping, and your trusting, on the general ground that God is merciful, you are just wrapping yourselves up in a delusive confidence, and pleasing yourselves with your own imagination; and the only real offer that ever was, or will be, made to sinful man, you are putting away from you. The mercy upon which you rest, is in disunion with truth. It is a spark of your own kindling, and if you continue to walk in it, it will lead you into a path of darkness, and bewilder you to your final undoing.

II. The evils of such a confidence as we have been attempting to expose, are mainly reducible to two, which we shall consider in order.

First, This delusive confidence casts an aspersion on the character of God. It would inflict a mutilation upon that character. It is confidence in such a mercy as would dethrone the lawgiver, and establish the anarchy of a wild misrule, over his fallen and dishonoured attributes. We may lightly take up with the conception that God is all tenderness, and nothing else, and thus try to accommodate the character of the Eternal, to the standard of our own convenience, and our own wishes. We, instead of looking to the immutability of the Godhead, and taking our fixed and permanent lesson from such a contemplation, may fancy of the Godhead, that he is ever assuming a new shape, and a new character, according to the frail and fluctuating caprices of human opinion. Instead of God making man according to his pleasure, man would form God in the mould of his own imagination. He forgets, that in the whole range of existence, he can only meet with one object who is inflexibly and everlastingly the same, and that is God,—that he may sooner think of causing the everlasting hills to recede from their basis, than of causing an infringement on the nature of the unalterable Deity, or

on the designs and maxims which support the method of his administration,—that to assume a character for him in our own mind, instead of learning what the character is from himself, is in fact to make the foolish thought of the creature, paramount to the eternal and immutable constitution of the Creator.

Let us therefore give up our own conceptions, and look steadily to that light in which God hath actually put himself forth to us. He has dealt out a variety of communications respecting his own ever-during character and attributes, to the children of men; and he tells us, that he is a God of truth, and that he is jealous of his honour, and that he will not be mocked, and that heaven and earth shall pass away, ere any of his words pass away. Let us just attend to some of these words:—He who continues not in the whole book of this law, is accursed. The whole world is guilty before God. He will by no means clear the guilty. Without shedding of blood, there is no remission. These are the words of God. He has put them into a record. Every one of us may read them, and compare the sayings of God, with the doings of God; and if they do not correspond, the one with the other, we may charge him with falsehood in the face of his insulting enemies, and lift the voice of mockery against him, and feel the triumph

which rebels feel, when they witness the timidity of a feeble monarch, who does not, or dares not, carry his threats into accomplishment. And is it possible, that the throne of the eternal God can rest on a basis so tottering,—or that, if ever he shall descend to the manifestation of mercy, he will not give the manifestation of his truth and his righteousness along with it?

Now, those who, without any reference to Christ, find their way to comfort on the strength of their own general confidence in God's mercy, make no account whatever of his truth, or his righteousness. What becomes of the threatenings of God? What becomes of the immutability of his purposes? What becomes of the unfailing truth of all his communications? What becomes of the solemnity of his warnings? and how is it possible to be at all impressed by them,—if they are ever and anon done away by a weak and capricious system of connivance? What becomes of the wide and everlasting distinctions, between obedience and sin? What becomes of the holiness of the Deity? What becomes of reverence for his name, among the wide circle of angels, and archangels, and seraphim, and cherubim, who have all heard his awful proclamations against the children of iniquity,—if they see that any one of them may, by a mere act of confidence in his mercy, turn

all that has been uttered against them into an unmeaning parade? Where, in a word, are all those sanctions and securities which can alone make the government of the Deity, to be a government at all? These are all questions which the people to whom we allude, never think of entertaining; nor do they feel the slightest concern about them; and they count it quite enough, if they can just work themselves up into such a tolerable feeling of security, as that they shall not be disturbed in the quiet enjoyment of the good things of this life, which form all in fact that their hearts long after, and which if only permitted to retain in peace, they positively care not for the glory of God, or how it shall be kept inviolate. This is not their affair. The engrossing desire of their bosoms, is just a selfish desire after their own ease; and the strange preparation for that heaven, the unceasing song of which is, "Holy and righteous are thy judgments, O thou King of Saints," is such a habit of confidence, as lays prostrate all the majesty of these high and unchangeable perfections.

And yet if you examine these people closely, you will obtain their consent to the position, that there is a law, and that the human race are bound to obedience, and that the authority of the law is supported by sanctions, and that the

truth, and justice, and dignity of the Supreme Being, are involved in these sanctions being enforced and executed. They do not refuse the tenet, that man is an accountable subject, and that God is a judge and a lawgiver. All that we ask of them, then, is, to examine the account which this subject has to render, and they will find, in characters too glaring to be resisted, that, with the purest and most perfect individual amongst us, it is a wretched account of guilt and of deficiency. That law, which is held to be in full authority and operation over us, has been most unquestionably violated. Now, what is to be made of this? Is the subject to rebel, and disobey every hour, and the king, by a perpetual act of indulgence, to efface every character of truth and dignity from his government? Do this, and you depose the legislator from his throne. You reduce the sanctions of his law to a name, and a mockery. You bring down the high economy of heaven, to the standard of human convenience. You pull the fabric of God's moral government to pieces; and unsubstantiate all the solemnity of his proclaimed sayings,—all the lofty annunciations of the law, and of the prophets,—all that is told of the mighty apparatus of the day of judgment,—all that revelation points to, or conscience can suggest, of a living and a reign-

ing God, who will not let himself down to be affronted, or trampled upon by the creatures whom he has formed.

They who, in profession, admit the truth of God, and yet take comfort from his mercy, without looking to him who bare in his own person, the accomplishments of all the threatenings, do in fact turn that truth into a lie. They who, in profession, admit the justice of God, and yet trust in the remission of their sins, without any distinct acknowledgment of him on whom God has laid the burden of their condemnation, do in fact prove, that in their mouths, justice is nothing but an unmeaning articulation. They who, in profession, admit the authority of those great and unchanging principles, which preside over the whole of God's moral administration, and yet assign to him such a loose and easy connivance at iniquity, as by a mere act of tenderness, to recall the every denunciation that he had uttered against it, do in fact put forth a sacrilegious hand to the pillars of that immutability, by which the government of creation is upheld and perpetuated. Let them rest assured, that there is no way of reconciliation, but such a way as shields all the holy, and pure, and inflexible attributes of the Divinity, from degradation and contempt. Out of that hiding-place which is made known

in the gospel, all that is just, and severe, and inflexible in the perfections of God, stands in threatening array against every son and daughter of the species. And if they will not look to God as he sets himself forth to us in the New Testament,—if they refuse to look unto him as God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses,—if they set aside all that is said about the blood of the everlasting covenant, and the new and living way of access, and the manner in which the mediatorship of Christ hath repaired all the indignities of sin, and shed a glory over the truth and justice of the Lawgiver,—if they will still persist in looking to him through another channel than that of his own revelation; he will persist in looking to them with the aspect of a stern and unappeased enemy. He will not let down the honours of his inflexible character, for the sake of those who refuse his way of salvation. He will not fall in with the delusions of those who profess to revere this character, and then shake the whole burden of conscious guilt and infirmity away from them, by the presumption, that in some way or other, the mercy of God will interpose to defend them from the vengeance of his more severe and unrelenting perfections. The one, and the only way in which he dispenses

mercy, is through the atonement of Christ,—and if your confidence be laid in any other quarter, he will put that confidence to shame. He will not accept the prayers of those, who can thus make free with the unchangeable attributes which belong to him. He will not descend with such to any intercourse of affection whatever. He will not own the approaches, nor will he deal out any boon from the storehouse of his grace, to those who profess a general confidence in his mercy,—when, instead of a mercy which guards, and dignifies, and keeps entire the whole glory and character of God, it is a mercy which belies his word, which invades his other perfections, which spoils the divine image of its grandeur, which breaks up the whole fabric of his moral government, and would make the throne of heaven the seat of an unmeaning pageant, the throne of an insulted and degraded sovereign.

The religion of nature, or the religion of unaided demonstration,—or the religion of our most fashionable and philosophical schools, leaves this question totally undisposed of;—and at the same time, till the question be resolved, all the hopes of the human soul are in a state of the most fearful uncertainty. This religion makes God the subject of its demonstrations, and it draws out a list of attributes,

and it makes the justice of God to be one of these attributes, and the placability of God to be another of them, and it admits that it is in virtue of the former perfection of his nature, that he makes condemnation and punishment to rest on the head of those who violate his law, and that it is in virtue of the latter perfection that he looks connivance, and extends pardon to such violations. Now, the question which the disciples of this religion have never settled, is, how to strike the compromise between these attributes. They cannot dissipate the cloud of mystery, which hangs over the line of demarcation that is between them. They cannot tell in how far the justice of God will insist on its exactions and its claims, or what the extent of that disobedience is, over which the placability of God will spread the shelter of a generous forgiveness. There is a dilemma here, out of which they cannot unwarp themselves,—a question to which they can give no other answer, than the expressive answer of their silence—and it is such a silence as leaves our every apprehension unquelled, and the whole burden of our unappeased doubts and difficulties as insupportable as before. What we demand is, that they shall lay down the steady and unalterable position of that limit, at which the justice of God, and the placability of God, cease their

respective encroachments on each other. If they cannot tell this, they can tell nothing that is of any consequence, either to the purpose of comfort, or of direction. The sinner wishes to know on which side of this unknown and undetermined limit, his degree of sinfulness is placed. He wishes to know whether his offences are such as come under the operation of justice, or of mercy,—whether the one attribute will exact from him the penalty, or the other will smile on him connivance. It is in vain to say, that if he repent and turn from them, mercy will claim him as her own, and recover him from the dominion of justice, and spread over all his sins the mantle of an everlasting oblivion. This may still be saying nothing,—for the work of repentance is a work, which, though he should be always trying, he always fails in; and in spite of his every exertion, there is a sin and a shortness in all his services. And when he casts his eye along the scale of character, he sees the better and the worse on each side of him; and the difficulty still recurs, how far down in the scale does mercy extend, or how far up on this scale does justice carry its fiery sentence of condemnation. And thus it is, that he feels no fixed security, which he can lay hold of,—no solid ground on which he can lay the trust of his acceptance with God. And this religion,

which has left the whole problem of the attributes undetermined, which can furnish the sinner with no light, by which he may be made to perceive how justice can be displayed, but at the expense of mercy, or how mercy can be displayed, but by breaking in upon the entireness of justice; this hollow, baseless, unsupported system, which, by mangling and deforming the whole aspect of the Deity, has virtually left man without God,—has also, by the faint and twilight obscurity, or rather by the midnight darkness in which it has involved the question, about the point of sinfulness at which the one attribute begins the exercise of its rigour, and the other ceases its indulgence, not only left man without God, but also left him without any solid hope in the world.

But, Secondly, the confidence we have been attempting to expose, is hostile to the cause of practical righteousness in the world.

For what is the real and experimental effect of the obscurity in question on the practice of mankind? The question about our interest with God, is felt to be unresolvable; and, under this feeling, no genuine attempt is made to resolve it. Man eases himself of the difficulty by putting it away from him; and, as he cannot find the point of gradation in the scale of character, on the one side of which, there lies acceptance

with God, and on the other side of it, condemnation,—he just upholds himself in tranquillity at any one point, and throughout every one variety of this gradation.

Let the question only be put, How far down, in the scale of character, may this loose system of confidence be carried? and where is the limit between those sins, to which forgiveness may be looked for, and those sins from which it is withheld? and you will seldom find the man who gives an answer against himself. The World, in fact, is so much the home and the resting-place of every natural man, that you will not get him so to press, and so to prosecute the question, as to come to any conclusion, that is at all likely to alarm him. He will not barter his present peace, for a concern that looks so distant to him as that of his eternity. The question touches but lightly on his feelings, and an answer conceived lightly, and given lightly, will be enough to pacify him. Go to the man, whose decent and unexceptionable proprieties make him the admiration of all his acquaintances, and even he will allow that he has infirmities; but he can smother all his apprehensions, and regale his fancy with the smile of an indulgent God. Take, now, a descending step in the scale of character; and do you think there is not to be met with there, the very same

process of conscious infirmity on the one hand, and of vague, general, and bewildering confidence on the other? Will the people of the lower station not do the very same thing with the people above them?—Compare themselves with themselves, and find equals to keep them in countenance, and share in the average respect that circulates around them, and take comfort in the review of their very fair and neighbourlike accomplishments, and with the allowance of being just such sinners as they are in the daily habit of associating with, get all their remorse, and all their gloomy anticipations disposed of, by throwing the whole burden of them, in a loose and general way, on the indulgence of God? And where, in the name of truth and of righteousness, will this stop? We can answer that question. It will not stop at all. It will describe the whole range of human character; and we challenge you to put your finger on that point where it is to terminate, or to find out the place where a barrier is to be raised, against the progress of this mischievous security. It will go downwards and downwards, till it come to the very verge of the malefactor's dungeon. Nay, it will enter there; and we doubt not that an enlightened discerner may witness, even in this receptacle of outcasts, the operation of the very sentiment, which gives

such peace and such buoyancy to him, whose moral accomplishments throw around him the lustre of a superior estimation. But this lustre will not impose on the eye of God. The Discerner of the heart sees that one and all of us are alienated from him, and strangers to the obligation of his high and spiritual requirements. He declares the name of Christ to be the only one given under heaven, whereby men can be saved; and after this, every act of confidence, disowning his name, is an expression of the most insulting impiety. On the system of general confidence, every man is left to sin just as much as he likes, and to take comfort just as much as his powers of delusion can administer to him. At this rate, the government of God is unhinged,—the whole earth is broken loose from the system of his administration,—he is deposed from his supremacy altogether,—peace, when there is no peace, spreads its deadly poison over the face of society,—and one sentiment, of deep and fatal tranquillity about the things of God, takes up its firm residence in a world, which, from one end to the other of it, sends up the cry of rebellion against him.

This a sore evil. The want of a fixed and clearly perceptible line between the justice and placability of the divine nature, not only buries in utter darkness the question of our acceptance

with God; but, by throwing every thing loose and undetermined, it opens up the range of a most lawless and uncontrolled impunity for the disobedience of man, up from its gentler deviations, and down to its most profligate and daring excesses. If there be no intelligible line to separate the exercise of the justice of God from the exercise of his placability, every individual will fix this line for himself; and he will make these two attributes to be yea and nay, or fast and loose with each other; and he will stretch out the placability, and he will press upon the justice, just as much as to accommodate the standard of his religious principles to the state of his religious practice; and he will make every thing to square with his own existing taste, and wishes, and convenience; and his mind will soon work its own way to a system of religious opinions which gives him no disturbance; and the spirit of a deep slumber will lay hold of his deluded conscience; and thus, from the want of a settled line,—from the vague, ambiguous, and indefinite way in which this matter is taken up, and brought to a very loose and general conclusion,—or, in other words, from that very way in which natural religion, whether among deists, or our more slender professors of Christianity, leaves the whole question, about the limit of the attributes, unentered upon,—

will every man take comfort in the imagined tenderness of God, just as much as he stands in need of it, and experiment on the patience of God just as far as his natural desires may carry him;—so that when we look to the men of the world, as they pass smoothly onward, from the cradle to the grave, do we see each of them in a state of profound security as to his interest with God; each of them solacing himself with his own conception about the slenderness of his guilt, and the kindness of an indulgent Deity; each of them in a state of false and fancied peace with Heaven, while every affection of the inner man, and many of the doings of the outer man, bear upon them the stamp of rebellion against Heaven's law; each of them walking without uneasiness, and without terror, while, at the same time, each and all of them do in fact walk in the counsel of their own hearts, and after the sight of their own eyes.

SERMON XVI.

THE UNION OF TRUTH AND MERCY IN THE GOSPEL.



Psalm lxxxv. 10.

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

It was not by a simple deed of amnesty, that man was invited to return and be at peace with God. It was by a deed of expiation. It was not by nullifying the sanctions of the law, that man was offered a free and a full discharge from the penalties he had incurred by breaking it. It was by executing these sanctions on another, who voluntarily took them upon himself, and who, in so doing, magnified the law, and made it honourable. To redeem us from the curse of the law, Christ became a curse for us. It was not by God lifting off our iniquities from our persons, and scattering them away into

a region of forgetfulness, without one demonstration of his abhorrence, and without the fulfilment of his threatenings against them; but lifting them off from us, he laid them on another, who bare, in his own person, the punishment that we should have borne. God laid upon his own Son the iniquities of us all. The guilt of our sins is not done away by a mere act of forgiveness. It is washed away by the blood of the Lamb. God set him forth a propitiation. He was smitten for our transgressions. He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God. The system of the gospel no more expunges the attribute of mercy from the character of the Godhead, than it expunges the attributes of truth and righteousness. But all the mercy which it offers and proclaims to a guilty world, is the mercy which flows upon it through the channel of that Mediatorship, by which his truth and his justice have been asserted and vindicated; and, while it reveals to us the openness of this channel, it also reveals to us that every other which the heart of man may conceive, is shut, and intercepted, and utterly impassable. There is none other name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved, but the name of him who poured out his soul unto the death for us. Without the shedding of his blood, there could have been no remission. And he who

hath not the Son, hath the wrath of God abiding on him.

It is due to our want of moral sensibility, that sin looks so light and so trivial in our estimation. We have no adequate feeling of its malignity, and of its exceeding sinfulness. And, liable as we are to think of God, that he is altogether like unto ourselves, do we think that he may cancel our guilt as easily from the book of his condemnation, by an act of forgiveness, as we cancel it from our own memory, by an act of forgetfulness. But God takes his own way, and most steadfastly asserts, throughout the whole process of our recovery, the prerogatives of his own truth, and his own righteousness. He so loved the world, as to send his Son to it, not to condemn, but to save. But he will not save us in such a way as to confirm our light estimation of sin, or to let down the worth and the dignity of his own character. The method of our salvation is not left to the random caprices of human thought, and human fancy. It is a method devised for us by unsearchable wisdom, and made known to us by fixed and unalterable truth, and prescribed to us by a supreme authority, which has debarred every other method; and though we may behold no one feature, either of greatness or of beauty to admire in it—yet do angels admire it; and to accomplish it, did the

Son of God move from the residence of his glory; and all heaven appears to have laboured with the magnitude and the mystery of the great undertaking; and along the whole tract of revelation, from the first age of the world, do we behold the notices of the coming atonement; and while man sits at his ease, and can see nothing to move him either to gratitude or to wonder, in the evolution of that mighty scheme, by which mercy and truth have been made to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other,—it is striking to mark the place and the prominency which are given to it, in the counsels of the Eternal. And it might serve to put us right, and to rebuke the levities which are so currently afloat in this dead and darkened world, did we only look at the stress that is laid on this great work, throughout the whole of its preparation and its performance,—and how to bring it to its accomplishment, the Father had to send the Son into the world,—and to throw a veil over his glory,—and to put the cup of our chastisement into his hand,—and to bid the sword of righteous vengeance awake against his fellow,—and, that he might clear a way of access to a guilty world, had to do it through the blood of an everlasting covenant,—and to lay the full burden of our atonement on the head of the innocent sufferer,—and to en-

dure the spectacle of his bitterness and his agonies, and his tears, till he cried out that it was finished, and so bowed himself and give up the ghost.

Man is blind to the necessity, but God sees it. The prayer of Christ in his agony was, that the cup, if possible, might be removed from him. But it was not possible. He could have called twelve legions of angels, and they would have eagerly flown to rescue their beloved Lord from the hands of his persecutors. But he knew that the Scripture must be fulfilled, and they looked on in silent forbearance. It behoved him to undergo all this. And there was a need, and a propriety, why he should suffer all these things, ere he entered into his glory.

We shall offer three distinct remarks on this method of our redemption, in order to prove that it fulfils the whole assertion of our text, that it has made mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other.

First, It maintains the entireness and glory of all the attributes of the Godhead. Secondly, It provides a solid foundation for the peace of every sinner who concurs in it. And, thirdly, It strengthens all the securities for the cause of practical righteousness among men.

I. In darkness, as we are, about the glory and character of the Supreme Being, it would offer a violence even to our habitual conceptions of him, to admit of any limit, or any deduction from the excellencies of his nature. We should even think it a lessening of the Deity, were the extent of his perfections such, as that we should be able to grasp them within the comprehension of our understandings. The property of chiefest admiration to his creatures is, that they know but a part, and are not aware how small a part that is, to what is unknown; and never is their obeisance more lowly, than when under the sense of a greatness that is undefined and unsearchable, they feel themselves baffled by the infinitude of the Creator. It is not his power as attested by all that exists within the limits of actual discovery; but his power, as conceived to form and uphold a universe, whose outskirts are unknown. It is not his wisdom, as exhibited in what has been seen by human eye; but his wisdom, as pervading the unnumbered secrecies of a mechanism, which no eye can penetrate. It is not his knowledge, as displayed in the greater and prophetic outlines of the history of this world; but his knowledge, as embracing all the mazes of creation, and all the mighty periods of eternity. It is not his antiquity, as prior to all that is visible, and as

reaching far above and beyond the remote infancy of nature; but his antiquity, as retiring upwards from the loftiest ascent of our imaginations, and lost in the viewless depths of an existence, that was from everlasting.—These are what serve to throne the Deity in grandeur inaccessible. It is the thought of what eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, that places him on such a height of mystery before us. And should we ever be able to overtake in thought, the dimensions, of any attribute that belongs to him,—and far more should we ever be able to outstrip in fancy, a single feature of that character which is realized by the living and reigning God,—should defect or impotency attach to him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, would we feel as if all our most rooted and accustomed conceptions of the Godhead had sustained an overthrow, would we feel as if the sanctuary of him who is the King eternal and invisible had suffered violence.

And this is just as true of the moral as of the natural attributes of the Godhead. When we think of his truth, it is a truth which, if heaven and earth stand committed to the fulfilment of its minutest article, heaven and earth must, for its vindication, pass away. When we think of his holiness, it is such that, if sin offer to draw

nigh, a devouring fire goeth forth to burn up and to destroy it. When we think of his law, it is a law which must be made honourable, even though, by the enforcement of its sanctions, it shall sweep into an abyss of misery all the generations of the rebellious. And yet this God, just, and righteous, and true, is a God of love, and of compassion, infinite. He is slow to anger, and of great mercy. He does not afflict willingly; and as a father rejoices over his children, does he long to rejoice in tenderness over us all; and out of the storehouse of a grace that is inexhaustible, does he deal out the offers of pardon and reconciliation to every one of us. Even in some way or other does the love of God for his creatures find its way through the barrier of their sinfulness; and he who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,—he who hath spoken the word, and shall he not perform it,—he of whose law it has been said, that not one jot, or one tittle of it, shall pass away, till all be fulfilled, he holds out the overtures of friendship to the children of disobedience, and invites the guiltiest among them to the light of his countenance, in time, and to the enjoyment of his glory and presence, in eternity.

There is no one device separate from the gospel, by which the glory of any one of these attributes can be exalted, but by the surrender

or the limitation of another attribute. It is in the gospel alone that we perceive how each of them may be heightened to infinity, and yet each of them reflect a lustre on the rest. When Christ died, justice was magnified. When he bore the burden of our atonement, the truth of God received its vindication. When the sins of the world brought him to the cross, the lesson taught by this impressive spectacle was, holiness unto the Lord. All the severer perfections of the Godhead were, in fact, more powerfully illustrated by the deep and solemn propitiation that was made for sin, than they could have been by the direct punishment of sin itself,—yet all redounding to the triumph of his mercy. For mercy, in the exercise of a simple and spontaneous tenderness, does not make so high an exhibition, as mercy forcing its way through restraints and difficulties,—as mercy accomplishing its purposes by a plan of unsearchable wisdom,—as mercy surrendering what was most dear, for the attainment of its object,—as the mercy of God, not simply loving the world, but so loving it as to send his only beloved Son, and to lay upon him the iniquities of us all,—as mercy, thus surmounting a barrier which, to created eye, appeared immoveable, and which both pours a glory on the other excellencies of the Godhead, and rejoices over them.

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has poured the light of day into all the intricacies of this contemplation. We there see no compromise, and no surrender, of the attributes to each other. We see no mutual encroachment on their respective provinces,—no letting down of that entire and absolute perfection which belongs to every part in the character of the Godhead. The justice of God has not been invaded; for, by him who poured out his soul unto the death for us, has the whole weight of this aggrieved and offended attribute been borne; and from that cross of agony, where he cried out that it was finished, does the Divine Justice send forth a brighter and a nobler radiance of vindicated majesty, than if the minister of vengeance had gone forth, and wreaked the whole sentence of condemnation on every son and daughter of the species. And as the justice of God has suffered no encroachment, so, such is the admirable skilfulness of this expedient, that the mercy of God is restrained by no limitation. It is arrested in its offers by no question about the shades, and the degrees, and the varieties of sinfulness. It stops at no point in the descending scale of human depravity. The blood of Christ cleansing from all sin, has spread such a field for its invitations, that in the full confidence of a war-

ranted and universal commission, may the messengers of grace walk over the face of the world, and lay the free gift of acceptance at the door of every individual, and of every family. Such is the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and yet it is a mercy so exercised, as to keep the whole counsel and character of God unbroken,—and a mercy, from the display of which, there beams a brighter radiance than ever from each lineament in the image of the Godhead.

Now, if the glory of God be so involved in this way of redemption, what shall we think of the disparagement that is rendered to him, and to all his attributes, by the man who, without respect to the work and the righteousness of Christ, seeks to be justified by his own righteousness? It is quite possible for man to toil and to waste his strength on the object of his salvation, and yet, by all he can make out, may be only widening his laborious deviation from the path which leads to it. Do his uttermost to establish a righteousness of his own, and what is the whole fruit of his exertion?—the mere semblance of righteousness, without the infusion of its essential quality,—labour without love,—the drudgery of the hand, without the desire and devotedness of the heart, as its inspiring

principle. If the man be dissatisfied, as he certainly ought to be, then a sense of unexpiated guilt will ever and anon intrude itself upon his fears; and a resistless conviction of the insufficiency of all his performances, will never cease to haunt and to paralyze him. In these circumstances, there may be the conformity of the letter extorted from him, in the spirit of bondage; but the animating soul is not there, which turns obedience into a service of delight, and a service of affection. In Heaven's account, such obedience as this is but the mockery of a lifeless skeleton; and, even as a skeleton, it is both wanting in its parts, and unshapely in its proportions. It is an obedience defective, even in the tale and measure of its external duties. But what pervades the whole of it by the element of worthlessness is, that, destitute of love to God, it is utterly destitute of a celestial character, and can never prepare an inhabitant of this world for the joys or the services of the great celestial family.

And, on the other hand, if the man be satisfied, this very circumstance gives to the righteousness that he would establish for himself, the character of an insult upon God, instead of a reverential offering. It is a righteousness accompanied with a certain measure of confident feeling, that it is good enough for the accep-

tance of the Lawgiver. There is in it the audacity of a claim and a challenge upon his approbation. Short as it is, in respect of outward performance, and tainted within by the very spirit of earthliness, it is brought like a lame and diseased victim in sacrifice, and laid upon the altar before him. It is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God; but it is a still more direct outrage upon his attributes, to expect that he will look on sinfulness with complacency. It is an open defiance to the law, to trample upon its requirements; but it were a still deadlier overthrow of its authority, to reverse its sanctions, and make it turn its threatenings into rewards. The sinner who disobeys and trembles, renders at least the homage of his fears to the truth and power of the Eternal. But the sinner who makes a righteousness of his infirmities, and puts a gloss upon his disobedience, and brings the accursed thing to the gate of the sanctuary, and bids the piercing eye of Omniscience look upon it, and be satisfied,—tell us whether the fire which cometh forth will burn up the offering, that it may rise in sweetly smelling savour to him who sitteth on the throne; or will it seize on the presumptuous offerer, who could thus dare the inspection, and thrust his unprepared footstep within the precincts of unspotted holiness?

And how must it go to aggravate the offence of such an approach, when it is made in the face of another righteousness which God himself hath provided, and in which alone he hath proclaimed, that it is safe for a sinner to draw nigh. When the alternative is fairly proposed, to come on the merit of your own obedience and be tried by it, or to come on the merit of the obedience of Christ, and receive in your own person the reward which he hath purchased for you,—only think of the aspect it must bear in the eye of heaven, when the offer of the perfect righteousness is contemptuously set aside, and the sinner chooses to appear in his own character before the presence of the Eternal. When the imputation of vanity and uselessness is thus fastened on all that the Son hath done, and on all that the Father hath devised, for the redemption of the guilty,—when that righteousness, to accomplish which, Christ had to travail in the greatness of his strength, is thus held to be nothing, by creatures whose every thought, and every performance, have the stain of corruption in them,—when that doctrine of his death, on which, in the book of God's counsel, is made to turn the deliverance of our world, is counted to be foolishness,—when the sinner thus persists in obtruding his own virtue on the notice of the Lawgiver, and refuses to put on,

as a covering of defence, the virtue of his Saviour,—we have only to contrast the lean, shrivelled, paltry dimensions of the one, with the faultless, and sustained, and Godlike perfections of the other, to perceive how desperate is the folly, and how unescapeable is the doom, of him who hath neglected the great salvation.

It is thus that the refusal of Christ, as our righteousness, stamps a deeper and a more atrocious character of rebellion on the guilty than before,—and it is thus that the word of his mouth, like a two-edged sword, performs one function on him who accepts, and an opposite function on him who despises it. If the gospel be not the savour of life unto life, it will be the savour of death unto death. If it be not a rock of confidence, it will be a rock of offence, and it will fall upon him who resists it, and grind him into powder. If we kiss not the Son, in the day of our peace, the day of his wrath is coming, and who shall be able to stand when his anger is kindled but a little? We have already offended God, by the sinfulness of our practice, —we may yet offend him still more, by the haughtiness of our pretensions. The evil of our best works constitutes them an abomination in his sight; but nothing remains to avert the hostility of his truth and his holiness against us, if by those works we seek to be justified. It

will indeed be the sealing up of our iniquity, if our obedience, impregnated as it is with the very spirit of that iniquity, shall be set up in rivalship to the obedience of his only and well-beloved Son,—if, by viewing the defect of our righteousness, as a thing of indifference, and the fulness of his, as a thing of no value, we shall heap insult upon transgression,—and if, after the provocation of a broken law, we shall maintain the boastful attitude of him who hath won the merit and the reward of victory, and in this attitude add the farther provocation of a slighted and rejected gospel.

II. We shall conclude, for the present, these brief and imperfect remarks, by adverting to the solidity of that foundation of peace, which the gospel scheme of mercy provides for every sinner who concurs in it. It is altogether worthy of observation, how, under this exquisite contrivance, the very elements of disquietude, in a sinner's bosom, are turned into the elements of comfort and confidence, in the mind of a believer. It is the unswerving truth of God, which haunts the former by the thought of the certainty of his coming vengeance. But this very truth, committed to the fulfilment of all those promises, which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, sustains the latter by the thought

of the certainty of his coming salvation. It is justice, unbending justice, which sets such a seal on the condemnation of the disobedient, that every sinner, who is out of Christ, feels it to be irrevocable. In Christ, this attribute, instead of a terror, becomes a security; for it is just in God to justify him who believes in Jesus. It is the sense of God's violated authority, which fills the heart of an awakened sinner with the fear that he is undone. But this authority, under the gospel proclamation, is leagued on the side of comfort, and not of fear; for this is the commandment of God, that we believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, as he has given us commandment. It is not by an act of mercy; triumphing over the other attributes, that pardon is extended to the sinful; for, under the economy of the gospel, these attributes are all engaged on the side of mercy; and God is not only merciful, but he is faithful and just in forgiving the sins of those who accept of Christ, as he is offered to them in the gospel. Those very perfections, then, which fix and necessitate the doom of the rebellious, form into a canopy of defence around the head of the believer. The guarantees of a sinner's punishment now become the guarantees of promise; and while, like the flaming sword at the gate of paradise, they turn every way, and shut him out of every

access to the Deity but one,—let him take to that one, and they instantly become to him the sureties and the safeguard of that hiding-place into which he has entered.

The foundation, then, of a believer's peace, is, in every way, as sure and as solid as is the foundation of a sinner's fears. The very truth which makes the one tremble, because staked to the execution of an unfulfilled threat, ministers to the other the strongest consolation. It is impossible for God to lie, says an awakened sinner, and this thought pursues him with the agony of an arrow sticking fast. It is impossible for God to lie, says a believer; and as he hath not only said but sworn, there are two immutable things by which to anchor the confidence of him, who hath fled for refuge to the hope set before him. He staggers not at the promises of God, because of unbelief. He holds himself steadfast, by simply counting him to be faithful who hath promised. It is through that very faith, by being strong in which he gives glory to God, that he gains peace to his own heart; and the justice which beams a terror on all who stand without, utterly passes by the shielded head of him, who hath turned to the strong hold, and taken a place under the shadow of his wings, who hath satisfied the justice of God, and taken upon himself the burden of its fullest vindication.

SERMON XVII.

THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.



ACTS xxvi. 18.

" Sanctified by faith."

III. IT is a matter of direct and obvious understanding, how the law, by its promises and its threatenings, should exert an influence over human conduct. We seem to walk in a plain path, when we pass onwards from the enforcements of the law, to the effect of them on the fears, and the hopes, and the purposes of man. Do this, and you shall live; and do the opposite of this, and you shall forfeit life,—form two clear and distinct processes, in the conceiving of which, there is no difficulty whatever. The motive and the movement both stand intelligibly out to the discernment of common sense;

nor in the application of such argument as this, to the design of operating on the character or life of a human being, is there any mystery to embarrass, any hidden step, which, by baffling our every attempt to seize upon it, leaves us in a state of helpless perplexity.

The same is not true of the gospel, or of the manner in which it operates on the springs of human action. It is not so readily seen, how its privileges can be appropriated by faith, and at the same time its precepts can retain their practical authority over the conduct of a believer. There is an alarm, and an honest alarm, on the part of many, lest a proclamation of free grace unto the world, should undermine all our securities for the cause of righteousness in the world. They look with jealousy upon the freeness. They fear lest a deed so ample and unconditional, of forgiveness for the past, should give rise, in the heart of a sinner, to a secure opinion of his impunity for the future. What they dread is, that to proclaim such a freeness of pardon on the part of God, would be to proclaim a corresponding freeness of practice on the part of man. They are able to comprehend how the law, by its direct enforcements, should operate in keeping men from sin; but they are not able to comprehend how, when not under the law, but under grace, there should continue

the same motives to abstain from sin, as those intelligible ones which the law furnishes, or even other motives, of more powerful operation. We are quite sure, that there is something here which needs to be made plain to the understandings of a very numerous class of inquirers, —a knot of difficulty which needs to be untied, —a hidden step in the process of explanation, on which they may firmly pass from what is known to what is unknown. There are not two terms, in the whole compass of human language, which stand more frequently and more familiarly contrasted with each other, than those of faith and good works; and this, not merely on the question of our acceptance before God, but also on the question of the personal character and acquirements of a true disciple of Christ. It is positively not seen, how the possession of the one should at all stimulate to the performance of the other,—how the peace of the gospel should reside in the same heart, from which there emanates, on the life of a believer, the practice of the gospel,—how a righteousness that is without the deeds of the law, should stand connected, in the actual history of him who obtains it, with a zealous, and diligent, and every-day doing of these deeds. There is much in all this, to puzzle the man who is experimentally a stranger to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Nor does it at all serve to extricate or to enlighten him, when he is made to perceive, that, in point of fact, those men who most cordially assent to the doctrine of salvation being all of grace and not of works, are most assiduous in so walking, and in so working, and in so painstaking, as if salvation were all of works, and not of grace. The fact is quite obvious and unquestionable. But the principle on which it rests, remains a mystery to the general eye of the world. They marvel, but they go no farther. They see that thus it is, but they see not how it is; and they put it down among those inexplicable oddities which do at times occur, both in the moral and natural kingdom of the creation.

But in all our attempts to dissipate this obscurity, it is well to advert to the total difference between him who has the faith, and him who has it not. The one has the materials of the argument under his eye, and within the grasp of his handling. The other may be able to recognize in the argument, a logical and consistent process; but he is at a loss about the simple conceptions, which form the materials of the argument. He is like a man who can perform all the manipulations of an algebraical process, while he feels not the force or the significancy of the symbols. His habits of ratioci-

nation enable him to perceive, that there is a connexion between the ideas in the argument. But the ideas themselves are not manifest to him. It is not in the power of reasoning to supply this want. Reasoning cannot create the primary materials of the argument. It only cements them together. And here it is, that you are met by the impotency of human demonstration,—and are reduced to the attitude of knocking at a door which you cannot open,—and feel your need of an enlightening spirit,—and are made to perceive, that it is only on the threshold of Christianity, where you can hold the intercourse of a common sympathy and understanding with the world,—and that, to be admitted to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, you must pass into a region of manifestation, where the world cannot follow, but where it will cast the imputation of madness, and of mysticism after you.

Without attempting to define faith, as to the nature of it, which could not be done but with other words more simple than itself, let us look to the objects of faith, and see whether there do not emanate from them, a sanctifying influence on the heart of every real believer.

First, then, the whole object of faith, is the matter of the testimony of God in Scripture.

So that though faith be a single principle, and is designated in language by a single term,—yet this by no means precludes it from being such a principle, as comes into contact, and is conversant with a very great variety of objects. In this respect it may bear a resemblance to sight, or hearing, or any other of the senses, by which man holds communication with the external things that are near him, and around him. The same eye, which, when open, looks to a friend, and can, from that very look, afford entrance into the heart for an emotion of tenderness, will also behold other visible things, and take in an appropriate influence from each of them,—will behold the prospect of beauty that is before it, and thence obtain gratification to the taste,—or will behold the sportive felicity of animals, and thence obtain gratification to the benevolence,—or will behold the precipice beneath, and thence obtain a warning of danger, or a direction of safety,—or may behold a thousand different objects, and obtain a thousand different feelings and different intimations.

Now the same of faith. It has been called the eye of the mind. But whether this be a well conceived image or not, it certainly affords an inlet to the mind for a great variety of communications. The Apostle calls faith the evidence of things not seen,—not of one such

thing, but of very many such things. The man who possesses faith, can be no more intellectually blind to one of these things, and at the same time knowing and believing as to another of them, than the man who possesses sight can, with his eye open, perceive one external object, and have no perception of another, which stands as nearly and as conspicuously before him. The man who is destitute of sight, will never know what it is to feel the charm of visible scenery. But grant him sight; and he will not only be made alive to this charm, but to a multitude of other influences, all emanating from the various objects of visible nature, through the eye upon the mind, and against which his blindness had before opposed a hopeless and invincible barrier. And the man who is destitute of faith, will never know what it is to feel the charm of the peace-speaking blood of Christ. But grant him faith; and he will not only be made alive to this charm, but to a multitude of other influences, all emanating from the various truths of revelation, through this intellectual organ, on the heart of him who was at one time blind, but has now been made to see. This will help, in some measure, to clear up the perplexity to which we have just now adverted. They who are under its darkening influence, conceive of the faith which worketh peace, that it has

only to do with one doctrine, and that that one doctrine relates to Christ, as a peace-offering for sin. Now, it is very true that it has to do with this one doctrine; but it has also to do with other doctrines, all equally presented before it in the very same record, and the view of all which is equally to be had, from the very same quarter of contemplation. In other words, the very same opening of the mental eye, through which the peace of the gospel finds entrance into the bosom of a faithful man, affords an entrance for the righteousness of the gospel along with it. The truth that Christ died for the sins of the world, will cast upon his mind its appropriate influence. But so also will the truth, that Christ is to judge the world; and the truth, that unless ye repent ye shall perish; and the truth, that they who have a right to the tree of life, are they who keep the commandments; and the truth, that an unrighteous man shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If a man see not every one object that is placed within the sphere of his natural vision, he sees none of them, and his whole body is full of darkness. If a man believe the Bible to be the word of God, he will read it; but if he read it, and believe not every one truth that lies within the grasp of his understanding, he believes none of them, and is in darkness, and knoweth not whither he is going.

If I open the door of my mind to the word of God, I as effectually make it the repository of various truths, as, if I open the door of my chamber, and take in the Bible, I make this chamber the repository of the book, and of every chapter, and of every verse, that is contained in it. I thus bring my mind into contact with every one influence, that every one truth is fitted to exercise over it. If there be nothing in these truths contradictory to each other, (and if there be, let this set aside, as it ought, the authority of the whole communication,) then the mind acts a right and consistent part in believing each of them, and in submitting itself to the influence of each of them. And thus it is, that believing the propitiation which is through the blood of Christ, for the remission of sins that are past, I may feel through him the peace of reconciliation with the Father; and believing that he who cometh unto Christ for forgiveness must forsake all, I may also feel the necessity which lies upon me of departing from all iniquity; and believing that in myself there is no strength, for the accomplishment of such a task, I may look around for other expedients, than such as can be devised by my own natural wisdom, or carried into effect by my own natural energies; and believing that, in the hand of Christ there are gifts for the rebellious, and that

one of these gifts is the Holy Spirit to strengthen his disciples, I may look to him for my sanctification, even as I look unto him for my redemption; and believing that the gift is truly promised as an answer to prayer, I may mingle a habit of prayer, with a habit of watchfulness and of endeavour. And thus may I go abroad over the whole territory of divine truth, and turn to its legitimate account every separate portion of it, and be in all a trusting, and a working, and a praying, and a rejoicing, and a trembling disciple,—and that, not because I have given myself up to the guidance of clashing and contradictory principles,—but because, with a faith commensurate to the testimony of God, I give myself over in my whole mind, and whole person, to the authority of a whole Bible.

But secondly, let us take what some may think a more restricted view of the object of faith, and suppose it to be Jesus Christ in his person and in his character. It is a summary, but at the same time, a most true and substantial affirmation, that we are saved by faith in Christ. And yet this very affirmation, true as it is, may have been so misunderstood as to darken the minds of many, into the very misconception that we are attempting to expose. I could not be said to have faith in an acquaintance, if I believed not all that he told me.

Nor have I faith in Christ, if I believe not every item of that communication of which he is the author, either by himself or by his messengers. So that faith in Christ, so far from excluding any of the truths of the Bible, comprehends our assent to them all. But we are willing to admit, that the phrase is calculated to fasten our attention more particularly on such truth as relates, in a more immediate manner, to the person and the doings of the Saviour. Take it in this sense, and you will find, that though eminently and directly fitted to work peace in the heart of a believer, it is just as directly and as powerfully on the side of his practical righteousness. When I think of Christ, and think of him as one who has poured out his soul unto the death for me, I feel a confidence in drawing near unto God. When employed in this contemplation, I look to him as a crucified Saviour. But without keeping mine eye for a single moment from off his person,—without another exercise of mind, than that by which I look unto Jesus, simply and entirely, as he is set forth unto me,—I also behold him at one time as an exalted Saviour, and at another time as a commanding Saviour, and at another time as a strengthening Saviour. In other words, by the mere work of faith in Christ, I bring my heart into contact with all those motives, and

all those elements of influence, which give rise to the new obedience of the gospel. When the veil betwixt me and the Saviour is withdrawn,—when God shines in my heart with the light of the knowledge of his own glory in the face of his Son,—when the Spirit taketh of the things of Christ, and showeth them unto me, and I am asked which of the things it is that is most fitted to arrest a convicted sinner, in the midst of his cries and prayers for deliverance,—I would say, that it was Christ lifted up on the cross for his offences, and pouring out the blood of that mighty expiation, by which the guilt of them all is washed away. This is the rock on which he will build all his hopes of acceptance before God. He will look unto Christ, and be at peace. But this is not the only attitude in which Christ is revealed to him. He will look to Christ as an example. He will look to him as a teacher. He will look to him in all the capacities which are attached to the person, or identified with the doings of the Saviour. He will look to him, asserting his right of authority and disposal over those whom he has purchased unto himself. He will, by the eye of faith, see that rebuking glance which our Saviour cast over the misconduct of his disciples,—and which, when Peter saw, by the eye of sight, he was so moved by the spectacle,

that he went out and wept bitterly. That meekness and gentleness of Christ, in the name of which Paul besought his disciples to walk no more after the flesh, will be present in its influence on those who, though they see him not, yet believe him, and have their conceptions filled and satisfied with his likeness. They will behold him to be an exalted Prince, as well as an exalted Saviour,—and they will count it a faithful saying, that he came to sanctify as well as redeem,—and they will look upwards to his present might as a commander, as well as forwards to his future majesty as a judge,—and they will be thoroughly persuaded, that to persevere in sin, is altogether to thwart the great aim of the enterprise of our redemption,—and they will understand, as Paul did, who affirmed, with expostulations and tears, that the enemies of righteousness are also the enemies of the cross;—and thus, from Christ, in all his various attitudes, will a moralizing power descend on the hearts of those who really believe in him,—and as surely as any man possesses the faith that is in Christ Jesus, so surely will he be sanctified by that faith.

And, thirdly, let us confine our attention still farther, to one particular article of our faith. Paul was determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Now, con-

ceive faith to attach itself to the latter clause of this verse, and that Christ crucified, for the time being, is the single object of its contemplation. There is still no such thing as a true faith, attaching itself to this one object exclusively; and though at one time it may be the sole contemplation which engrosses it, at other times it may have other contemplations. If, in fact, it shut out those other contemplations, which are furnished by the subject-matter of the testimony of God, it may be proved now, and it will be proved in the day of reckoning, to be no faith at all. But just as it has been said, that the mind can only think of one thing at a time, so faith may be employed, for a time, in looking only towards one object; and as we said before, let Christ crucified be conceived to be that one object. From what has been said already, it will be seen, that this one exercise of faith will not counteract the legitimate effect of the other exercises. But we should like to compute the influence of this one exercise on the heart and life of a believer. In the case of an Antinomian, the doctrine of the atonement may furnish a pretext and a pacification to his conscience, under a wilful habit of perseverance in iniquity. But, if this partial faith of his be not a real faith, then we are not responsible for his conduct, nor ought he to be at all quoted

as an exception against that alliance, for which we are contending, between the faith of the gospel and the cause of practical righteousness. Only grant the faith to be real, and as there is no one doctrine of the Bible, out of which it may not gather a purifying influence to the heart,—so out of this doctrine of the atonement, will such a purifying influence descend most abundantly on the heart of every genuine believer.

For, it first takes away a wall of partition, which, in the case of every man who has not received this doctrine, lies across the path of his obedience at the very commencement. So long as I think that it is quite impossible for me so to run as to obtain, I will not move a single footstep. Under the burden of a hopeless controversy between me and God, I feel as it were weighed down to the inactivity of despair. I live without hope; and so long as I do so, I live without God in the world. And besides, he, while the object of my terror, is also the object of my aversion. The helpless necessity under which I labour, so long as the question of my guilt remains unsettled, is to dread the Being whom I am commanded to love. I may occasionally cast a feeble regard towards that distant and inaccessible Lawgiver: but so long as I view him shrouded in the darkness of

frowning majesty, I can place in him no trust, and I can bear towards him no filial tenderness. I may occasionally consult the requirements of his law: but when I look to the uncancelled sentence that is against me, I can never tread, with hopeful or assured footsteps, on the career of obedience. But let me look unto Christ lifted up for our offences, and see the hand writing of ordinances that was against us, and which was contrary unto us, nailed to his cross, and there blotted out, and taken out of the way; and then I see the barrier in question levelled with the ground. I now behold the way of repentance cleared of the obstructions, by which it was aforetime rendered utterly impassable. This is the will of God,—even your sanctification may be sounded a thousand times in the ear of an unbeliever, and leave him as immoveable as it found him; because while under a sense of unexpiated guilt, he sees a mighty parapet before him, which he cannot scale. But if the same words be sounded in the ears of a believer, they will put him into motion. For to him the parapet is opened up, and the rough way is made smooth, and the mountain and the hill are brought low, and the valley of separation is filled, and he is made to see the salvation of God. The path of obedience is made level before him, and he enters

it with the inspiration of a new and invigorating principle; and that love to God, which the consciousness of guilt will ever keep at a distance from the heart, now takes up the room of this terrifying, and paralyzing, and alienating sentiment; and the reception of this doctrine of atonement is just as much the turning point of a new character, as it is the turning point of a new hope; and it is the very point, in the history of every human soul, at which the alacrity of gospel obedience takes its commencement, as well as the cheerfulness of gospel anticipations. Till this doctrine be believed, there is no attempt at obedience at all; or else, it is such an obedience as is totally unanimated by the life and the love of real godliness. And it is not till this doctrine has taken possession of the mind, that any man can take up the language of the Psalmist, and say, "Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds."

Conceive, then, a believer with the career of obedience thus opened up and made hopeful to him,—conceive him with the necessity of obedience made just as authentically known to him, as are the tidings of his deliverance from guilt,—conceive a man who, by the act of rendering homage to the truth of God, rests a confidence in the death of Christ for pardon, and who also,

by the very same act, subscribes to the sayings of Christ about repentance, and the new walk of the new creature,—and then let me ask you to think of the securities which encompass his mind, and protect it from the delusion that we have already alluded to. We have said that the peace which is felt in a vague apprehension of God's mercy, and which makes no account of his truth, or of his justice, has the effect of making him who entertains it altogether stationary, in point of acquirement. With the semblance of good that he has about him, he will meet the sterner attributes of the Deity. For his defect of real good, he will draw on the indulgent attributes of the Deity. He will make the character of God, suit itself to his own character, so that any stimulus to advance or to perfect it, shall be practically done away. And thus it is, that along the whole range of human accomplishment, you may observe an unvaried state of repose,—the repose, in fact, of death, —for the repose of men who brought to the estimate of a spiritual law, will be found, to use the significant language of the Bible, dead in trespasses and sins,—sinning at one time without remorse, trusting at another time without foundation.

Now the gospel scheme of mercy is clear of this abuse altogether. It comes forth upon the

sinner with an antidote against this security, just as strong and as prominent as is its antidote against despair. Insomuch that the state of the believer, in respect of motive and of practical influence, is the very reverse of what we have now adverted to. In the act of becoming a believer, he awakens from the deep and the universal lethargy of nature. With his new hope commences his new life. He ceases to be stationary,—and what is more, he never ceases to be progressive. He does not satisfy himself with barely moving onwards to a higher point in the scale of human attainment, and then sitting down with the sentiment that it is enough. He never counts it enough. The practical attitude of the believer is that of one who is ever looking forwards. The practical movement of the believer is that of one who is ever pressing forwards. He could not, without a surrender of those essential principles which make him what he is, tarry at any one point in the gradation of moral excellence. It is not more inseparable from him to be ever doing well, than it is inseparable from him to be ever aspiring to do better. So that the paltry question about the degrees and the comparisons of virtue, he entertains not for a moment; and, with all the aids and expedients of the gospel for helping his advancement, does he strenuously prosecute

the work of conforming to the precept of the gospel,—to be growing in grace, to be perfecting himself in holiness.

It has been a much controverted question, how far this process of continual advancement will carry a believer in this world. Some affirm it will carry him to the point of absolute perfection. Others more cautiously satisfy themselves by the remark, that whether perfection be ever our attainment or not, it ought always to be our aim. And one thing seems to be certain,—that there is no such perfection in this world, as might bring along with it the repose of victory. Paul counted all that was behind as nothing, and he pressed onwards. And it is the experience of every Christian, who makes a real business of his sanctification, that there is a struggle between nature and grace, even unto the end. There is no discharge from this warfare, while we are in the body. To the last hour of life there will be the presence of a carnal nature to humble him, and to make him vigilant; and, with every true Christian, there will be the ascendancy of grace, so as that this nature shall not have the dominion over him. The corruption of the old man will be effectually resisted; but not, we fear, till the materialism of our actual frames be resolved into dust, will this corruption be destroyed. The flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against

the flesh, is the short but compendious description of the state of every believer in the world; —and could the evil and adverse principle, be eradicated, as well as overborne,—could a living man bid the sinful propensity, with all its workings and all its inclinations, conclusively away from him,—could the authority of the new creature obtain such unrivalled sway over the whole machinery of the affections and the doings, that resistance was no longer felt, and the battle was brought to its termination,—if it were possible, we say, for a disciple, on this side of the grave, to attain the eminency of a condition so glorious, then we know not of what use to him would be either a death or a resurrection, or why he might not bear his earthly tabernacle to heaven, and set him down by direct translation amongst the company of the celestial. But no! There hangs about the person of the most pure and perfect Christian upon earth, some mysterious necessity of dying. That body, styled with such emphasis a vile body, by the Apostle, must be pulverized and made over again. And not till that which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption,—not till that which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power,—not till that which is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body,—not till the soul of man occupy another tenement, and the body which now holds him

be made to undergo some unknown but glorious transformation, will he know what it is to walk at perfect liberty, and, with the full play of his then emancipated powers, to expatiate without frailty, and without a flaw, in the service of his God.

We know that the impression which many have of the disciples of the gospel is, that their great and perpetual aim is, that they may be justified,—that the change of state which they are ever aspiring after, is a change in their forensic state, and not in their personal,—that if they can only attain delivery from wrath, they will be satisfied,—and that the only use they make of Christ, is, through his means, to obtain an erasure of the sentence of their condemnation. Now, though this, undoubtedly, be one great design of the gospel, it is not the design in which it terminates. It may, in fact, be only considered as a preparation for an ulterior accomplishment altogether. Christ came to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It were selfishness, under the guise of sacredness, to sit down, in placid contentment, with the single privilege of justification. It is only the introduction to higher privileges.

But not till we submit to the righteousness of Christ, as the alone meritorious plea of our acceptance, shall we become personally righteous

ourselves,—not till we see the blended love and holiness of the Godhead, in our propitiation, shall we know how to combine a confidence in his mercy, with a reverence for his character, —not till we look to that great transaction, by which the purity of the divine nature is vindicated, and yet the sinner is delivered from the coming vengeance, shall we be freed from the dominion of sin, or be led to admire and to imitate the great Pattern of excellence. The renewing Spirit, indeed, is withheld from all those who withhold their consent from the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Paul was determined to know nothing else; and it is in this knowledge, and in this alone, that we are renewed after the image of him who created us.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

FINIS.

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